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A HERO'S WORK.

VOL. III.

A HERO'S WORK.

BY

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"A CASUAL ACQUAINTANCE,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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A HERO'S WORK.

CHAPTER I.

THE HERO'S RETURN.

"'Tis sweet to hear the honest watch-dog's bark,
Bay deep-mouth'd welcome as we draw near home,
'Tis sweet to know there is an eye will mark
Our coming, and look brighter when we come."



THE next few months passed quickly away. The spring came, with its buds and its blossoms, its sunshine and its singing-birds, flooding the land with fresh young beauty. The heart of England was glad, and thrilled with one universal feeling of pride and joy, as she rose to welcome her brave children home from the cruel war in which they had been engaged for her honour. The

strife between nations was over. Peace was already trampling down the rank weeds that had sprung up on the red battle-field, and sowing seeds of reconciliation and good-will; cheering the living and sanctifying the dead. In many a home busy preparations were going forward to receive the home-returning heroes; but some, alas! were filled with grief and mourning for those who would return no more.

At Crofton, in the village as well as at the Rectory, all was on the tip-toe of expectation, eagerly anticipating the arrival of Captain Dundas. Poor old Kitty Davis literally seemed to live on the platform of the railway-station. She was haunted with a vague, undefined idea that her boy would accompany the Captain home. Some of the most influential families in the neighbourhood proposed to organize a meeting, in order to give the young soldier a popular reception; but while they were consulting, arguing, and talking the matter over, Archibald Dundas himself put an end to the

discussion. The time his regiment was expected home was, of course, pretty well known to the public generally, though it was impossible to tell the precise day or hour when it would arrive, being subject to the wild will of the winds and waves. However, all went well, and exactly on the appointed day the vessel, with her streamers flying, steamed into Southampton Water, bearing her rich burden of yearning hearts, and war-worn, weary bodies, back to their native home.

Captain Dundas, having duly fulfilled the duties that devolved upon him, consulted the time-tables, and found that by availing himself of the first train that started, he might reach Crofton in time for the Rectory dinner. He calculated that he might remain there exactly two hours, before his military duties demanded his return to his regiment. Accordingly, following his own quaint fashion, he threw a rough military cloak over his ragged regimentals, and took his place for Crofton.

Arrived there, he strolled through the village, with his hands in his pockets, and a cigar in his mouth; he nodded and smiled at two or three people whom he recognized, and passed on, without waiting to see if they recognized him. He opened the gate, and lounged through the dear old Rectory gardens with an air of nonchalance, as though he had been out for a day's shooting, and had come home in the evening to rest. Life went on with such regular precision at the Rectory, that he could tell, with a tolerable certainty of being correct, how and where they would be employed at any given moment. It was near their dinner hour, but he knew they would be in the breakfast-room, where they usually remained chatting over the events of the day till dinner was announced.

He passed round the house till he reached the uncurtained window, and looked in. He was right. There they were, with the old happy home-look surrounding them. Mrs. Carl-

ton sat at her Davenport, busily writing; the Rector looked a trifle older and greyer, so Archie thought. He had thrown himself languidly into his arm-chair, as though wearied out with his day's work. Lena, who had a soft, womanly way of curling herself up and nestling down in snug places, was now cosily ensconced by her father's side; judging by the smiles that rippled over her face, she was telling him some pleasant adventure, or, perhaps, Archie thought, she was talking of him, little dreaming he was so near her. His eye rested on her face, and ranged no farther. She too was changed; her slight figure had grown more fully developed; her round, girlish beauty had softened down into the flowing grace of early womanhood. He tapped impatiently at the window; his heart seemed to rise up into his throat, and beat with an eager longing to hear the beloved voices ring out a cheering welcome to him. They were startled, and for a second gazed at the window, wondering

who that bearded apparition could be. Lena's heart recognised him on the instant.

"Archie!" she exclaimed; and with trembling hands flew to unhasp the window. In a second she was in his arms; a minute more, and the whole family were round him, showering down welcomes of looks and words upon him. Men are rarely demonstrative—at least, to one another; but with them a very little means a great deal. A warm hand-clasp, a pat upon the shoulder, a few cheering, sympathetic words, seem to speak volumes.

"My dear boy!" the Rector said, and nothing more, as he took Archibald by the hand, and held it in a firm, strong hold; while his face beamed with a welcome he could not well have expressed in words. Mrs. Carlton was glad to see him for Lena's sake; certainly not from any merit of his own. As for Lena herself, it would be impossible to paint the intensity of joy she felt at the beloved one's return, after passing through so many perils

and dangers. There were smiles upon her lips, light in her eyes, and a soft, tremulous quiver in her voice, that told him how hard it was to keep down the rising tide of love and joy that was ready to rush forth and overwhelm him. She expressed no exuberant, girlish glee at seeing him; spoke no regular, connected words of welcome; the little she did say was full of broken sounds of ill-repressed joy, that would come bubbling up, in spite of her best endeavours to keep calm. As for Archie, his long, sinewy fingers closed over her small, white hand, and held it fast prisoner—a prisoner that had no will to be free. The first greeting over, Grace and the Rector besieged him with questions, and though he was fully occupied, answering first one and then the other, his eyes rested ever upon Lena's face. She was content to ask nothing; to know nothing, except that he was there, home again, safe and well.

At last, when their eager voices were for a

moment silent, he reminded them that he had scarcely another hour to stay, and had not broken his fast since morning. The words created a perfect consternation among them.

"Going in an hour!" faltered Lena.

"Not far away; nor yet for long," he answered. "I was so anxious to see you all, that I believe if I had only had two minutes, instead of two hours, I should have run down to snatch a look, a word, a kiss, perhaps, and rushed back again. See," he added, throwing open his large military cloak, "what a tatter-damalion I am! I wouldn't even stay to throw off my rags."

"I do believe you are proud of them," said Grace; "you want us to see how much you have suffered, and to compassionate you."

"Compassionate!" echoed Lena; "I don't think it is compassion he needs. Those rags are so many signs of honour and glory! I should like to wrap them in lavender, and keep them among my most sacred treasures as long as ever I live."

"And I should like to make a bonfire of them," laughed Grace.

"Lena looks at my desperately ragged appearance from a sentimental point of view. You are more decidedly practical, Grace."

"And I would bring my practical hand to bear upon that dreadful beard of yours, Archie, if I had the right. Your face is positively more than half covered with hair. You look hideous! If I was Lena, I wouldn't——"

"I like a beard," said Lena, interrupting her quickly, "and yours is very handsome, Archie; such a beautiful colour, too. I do wonder, though, how you find your way to your mouth——"

"I can do more than that," he answered, laughing, "I can find my way to yours."

And he suited the action to the word.

"It's a good thing Lena doesn't mind it, I wouldn't let you kiss me for twenty pounds," said Grace.

"I will promise not to try, even if you offer to double the amount."

Lena watched his every movement, and listened to the lightest word he uttered, with a kind of silent adoration. She felt as though it were a piece of presumption, on her part, to love such a superior being as he seemed to be. To be loved by him in return, was bliss, so far beyond the merits of any ordinary mortal, that she considered it had fallen to her lot as a special act of grace.

"I am so proud of you, Archie," she said, in the fulness of her heart; "even in these rags you look so grand and noble. You look every inch like the hero that you are. You have honour and glory written on your face!"

"It is written, then, with an indifferent pen and invisible ink!" said Grace. "No eyes but Lena's could decipher the characters."

"Her eyes have a magnifying power," re-

plied Captain Dundas, looking fondly at her. "You, Grace, always look through diminishing glasses."

"If I did, sir," she answered pertly, "I should diminish your self-conceit, as well as your nobler proportions."

There was always something in Grace's badinage that jarred discordantly on Lena's spirit. If it was not positively ill-natured, there was a spice of something approaching so near ill-nature, that it had the same effect. However, in a war of words with Archibald, she generally came off second best. His courtesy would let her run, with pert security, to the length of her tether; then his sharp wit overtook her, and came down with such force that it shivered her small conceits into a thousand pieces. Mrs. Carlton put an end to their light skirmishing by announcing that dinner was not only served, but had been waiting some time.

"I am quite ashamed," she said, "of our

inhospitality in not thinking of your wants before."

"I dare say it seems horribly unromantic," he said, "and by no means heroic, for a fellow to be hungry; but these common-place bodily wants will make themselves known, even under the most celestial circumstances. I shall do full justice to your table, Guardy; it is so long since I have been served in a civilized Christian fashion; but I hope I have not forgotten Christian manners."

"You must have gone through a world of trials, my dear boy," began the Rector.

"Oh! enough of my adventures for the present," exclaimed Archibald, interrupting him; "you shall feast on them to repletion by-and-bye. Tell me something of yourselves; at present home news is the sweetest thing to my ears."

"I don't think we have much news to tell you of ourselves," said Mr. Carlton. "As you see, we are all well and happy, and de-

lighted to see you home again. I only wish you were going to stay with us."

For the moment, even the Rector had forgotten his son; poor Laurence had led such a roving Will-o'-the-wisp sort of life, that it seemed he had gradually dropped out of the family circle, and was hardly counted as one of them.

"Tell me something of your neighbours, then," said Archie; "your schools, your balls, your musical parties, Lena; only don't make me frantically jealous—you see I have the means of destruction at hand."

"You will not be driven to that," exclaimed Lena; "I think I have told, or rather written to you, a circumstantial account of everything and everyone. I am afraid you found my letters very stupid."

"Don't fish for compliments, puss—I can only administer Homœopathic doses in public."

"But there is one piece of news which I think will interest you," said the Rector.

"You remember Mr. Sterndale? he has left the village."

"I am glad of it—he was one of my pet aversions—I hated the fellow," rejoined Archibald, "and I hope he'll never come back."

"His is a most extraordinary and romantic story!" continued the Rector.

"I suppose he found a fortune in a pill-box," said Archibald; "cured some lady's corpulent lap-dog, and she, out of gratitude, married and carried him off to some invisible fairy-land. That is the only style of romance that could cling to that lanky-legged doctor."

"Your brilliant imagination is at fault," said the Rector, who well knew that the two men were always at feud; "and I don't think, Archibald, that you ever did, or ever will, understand the intrinsic value of 'that man.'"

"Probably not, for these intrinsically valuable people are outwardly so unsightly and worthless—but I interrupt you, please tell me the real story."

"It is too long to tell you the details at present; but the gist of it is this: He has inherited a very handsome property. Frederic Sterndale, our poor village apothecary, is now Sir Frederic Trevor."

"The deuce he is!" exclaimed Archibald, amazed.

"The strangest part of the story is this. A young gentleman, suffering from some disastrous malady, was put under his care. He discovered that his patient was a distant relative, whose heir he was——"

"How lucky these doctors are!" exclaimed Archie; "what power they have! Of course he killed him? No! well, then, like a wise man, I suppose he let him die quietly, a natural death."

"He acted like a true man and gentleman as he is, Archie; though entreated to act, he gave up the case, advised that he should be carried up to London and placed under the best physicians."

"Unexampled generosity, Guardy!—but bad's

the best, he knew it was a safe card—of course the boy died?”

“Unfortunately, yes; the first medical care in London failed to save him. He is buried here in Crofton. It was his last wish.”

“And I dare say the doctor put on a crape hat-band, and went to the funeral.”

“Of course he did—it was quite proper that he should, I think,” said Lena.

“It only proves the wicked hypocrisy of this world,” replied Archie; “as though a man could mourn for a fellow who left him—how many thousands a year, did you say?”

“You shouldn’t laugh at such things, Archie,” exclaimed Lena; “don’t tell him any more about it, papa.”

“I’ll finish the rest of the story on my own account,” laughed Archie. “I know Sterndale—I beg his pardon, Trevor, I think you called him—was very intimate at the Manor-house. Well, he has proposed to that grim old Dowager and disappeared with her from Crofton.”

The idea of connecting Madame de Fontaine's name with matrimony and "Frederic Sterndale," made even the Rector smile. Insensibly the conversation glided off to the other inhabitants of the Manor-house, and the unhappy state of affairs there was talked over and discussed.

"You must remember Adrienne?" said Lena; "you saw her in church the very last Sunday you spent at Crofton."

It was by no means a difficult task to recall Adrienne to his mind; he remembered her well, and became so deeply interested in her story, or in Lena's way of telling it, that he forgot how time was passing, and ran some risk of losing his train. The Rector ordered the horse to be put to, as he intended to drive Captain Dundas to the station himself.

"This is but a flying visit, Archie," he said; "I suppose we shall soon see you again."

"Be sure of that; every moment I have to spare I shall spend at Crofton; but I dare say I shall be much occupied for some time to come."

"I suppose you will be lionised at a very lively rate," exclaimed Grace, "when you get to London. The people seem to be going mad about the war and its heroes, and I believe you are considered one on a very large scale."

"The madness will soon pass away," answered Archie. "We shall, perhaps, be fêted and fooled for an hour; have a small stock of empty honours scattered among us—some will get the lion's share; some the chaff; some the grain. Then we shall sink rapidly down to mere commonplace mortals. You see," he added smiling, "I am not ambitious. I don't expect too much."

"Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall not be disappointed," said the Rector.

The chaise rolled quickly to the door. Archie bade Mrs. Carlton and Grace good-bye, then turned to Lena, and whispered,

"You must go with me to the station, Lena; I have not had time to speak, hardly to look at you. Be quick, throw on your hat and shawl, and come." Delighted at his suggestion, she

ran away to obey his request, as the Rector appeared, drawing on his gloves.

"Come, jump in," he said, "we have no time to lose."

"Wait, just one minute—Lena is coming with us to the station," said Archie.

"She is best at home," said the Rector. "See what a dark, misty night it is—and feel this bitter east wind. She had better not go."

"I don't think I shall feel it," murmured Lena's silvery voice at his side. "See how warmly I am wrapped up; and with this thick Shetland veil over my face, the coldest, cruellest wind can't touch me."

"She must go. I must have my will," urged Archie. "I have been so long away, I think I have learned the right to play the tyrant, at least a little, now I have come back."

"Well, jump in," said the Rector; "there is no time for talking, or you will miss your train."


In a second Lena was seated—Archie sprang

in beside her, and half buried her in the folds of his huge military cloak, which he insisted on throwing round her—to keep her warm, he said. She felt now the full joy of his coming home. She knew she had been restrained, and fancied she had been coldly common-place on his first arrival; but she could not help it; she could not show her real feeling of joy and pride before any eyes except his own. That ride through the dark cold night seemed the most glorious she had ever known—she wished that it might never end.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

“ And dark, though all the world is bright ;
And lonely, with a city in sight ;
And desolate in the rainy night.”

T is always a pleasant thing to feel we have done our duty, whether it be in the public service, or in private life. The feeling is in itself felicitous, and diffuses an air of genial satisfaction around us, verifying, to a certain extent, the old saying, “Virtue is its own reward.” In addition to the agreeable feeling of being virtuous, and receiving the reward (often a poor one) which virtue bestows, there is a natural craving in our human nature for our good or great deeds to be known and

acknowledged by the approbation of the world around us. No man will labour long, or well, for a thankless land. It is true, there may be some who are content with the approval of their own conscience, and the knowledge that God above sees all, and rewards according to His certain prescience. They look for nothing more. But such as these are few.

No one knew more of human nature than England's greatest philosopher; he said, "The best temper of minds desireth good name and true honour." The lighter popularity and applause, the more depraved subjection and tyranny. It is incontrovertible that the generality of men, whose works are worth chronicling, have laboured, and will labour, for the advancement, or for the aggrandizement of their pursuit; they are content to sacrifice all ordinary pleasures, health, wealth, comfort, often life itself, to obtain their object—they will give all, and expect little in return; but that little is essential for their happiness. Some are satisfied if their

deeds are recognised, and a shade of empty honour falls upon their names. Their services have been acknowledged, and they are satisfied. Such men are animated and carried through great struggles by a longing for that something which is to crown and reward them when the struggle is over. They have their price, and are content with nothing short of it.

Archibald Dundas walked through the world of London with the consciousness of a man who knew he had done nobly and well; he felt that he had a right to receive the reward of a good service done. Rumour had unloosed her hundred tongues, and blown his fame hither before him. The fresh blaze of popularity burst full upon him, and followed him wherever he went. The tide of public opinion set so strongly in his favour, that it swept him along unresistingly, and carried him into strange scenes and places. Exclusive circles opened, as if by magic, to receive him. Mer-

chant princes and princely gentlemen invited him to their houses; their wives and daughters rewarded him with their brightest smiles, and entertained him with their graceful wit. Mute homage waited upon his footsteps. He often stood face to face with his imaginary self exposed in shop-windows, for sale at one shilling a head, for the decoration of ladies' albums; he was impressed on satin book-markers, even printed on children's cotton handkerchiefs, and sold for twopence.

Though courted and flattered on all sides, yet he was not dazzled in the slightest degree by the popular demonstration. He valued it, like all wise men, at its proper worth; he knew it was a fever-fit that would pass away when the novelty was over. Meanwhile he let no grass grow under his feet, but took every advantage of his position while fortune favoured him. He was advanced in his profession, so far as the military service permitted; and deeply gratified he was by the expressions of

esteem which fell from his superiors, as well as from his brother officers. In due time he was recommended to the notice of his sovereign, and was offered a post in the royal household.

He deliberated slowly, and weighed the matter well over in his own mind before he accepted it. He did not like the idea of the courtly restraint that would necessarily be imposed upon him in such an office. He remembered the war was over, and that there would be no active service for him—a thing he craved for—unless he contrived to effect an exchange and go abroad, which he certainly had no notion of doing. This appointment would give him honourable employment, and a position which would, by most people, be considered a most enviable one, especially when regarded from a social point of view. He would be brought into close association with the many members of the royal family, a distinction that falls to the lot of few, and he rather liked the idea of it. He consulted no one, but resolved to be guided by his

own judgment only. He sat cogitating, with a cigar between his lips, watching the graceful smoke as it curled in feathery forms beneath his nostrils—speculating on many matters, putting the pros and cons side by side, and reasoning upon them with all the coldness of his nature. At last he rose leisurely from his seat, flung the end of his cigar beneath the grate, and decided to accept the offered honour. His determination, like all other good news of himself, was duly chronicled, and despatched to his friends at Crofton; he knew they were watching him through every step of his career with anxious hearts.

The life he led in London was highly agreeable to his idiosyncrasy; though the novelty was wearing off, yet the excitements continued to charm him; in fact, but for one slight drawback, life would have been a perfect elysium. There was one acid-drop in his cup of joy which would occasionally float on the top and flavour the whole draught; amidst

all his fascination and excitability, there were times when he felt triste and lonely. He did not seem to care to enjoy alone the rich fullness of his life, in all its triumph and pride. He often glanced with weary eyes upon the crowd of bright, smiling faces which were surging round him; they were all of the world—worldly; he knew that when his day was over, they would, every one, transfer their homage and their smiles to the next object on whom fickle fortune smiled, or whom chance had made famous. He yearned for a sight of that one sweet face which he knew, under all circumstances, would shine upon him with equal love and pride, now and for evermore; never heeding whether he stood high or fell low in the world's estimation; there, in one heart at least, he knew that he would always reign supreme. His triumphs and ascendancy would have been increased a hundredfold, if his friends at Crofton could have looked on and beheld them. As matters stood, he was

compelled to be satisfied; he ran down to Crofton whenever he was able; when he could not, he kept up a kind of running fire through the post, which transferred all his sayings and doings to Lena's ears. Their marriage was discussed, and it was decided it should take place in the autumn.

One evening, between seven and eight o'clock, as he was lounging slowly down Regent Street, on his way to the club, where he intended to dine, he observed a slight girlish figure, which had turned sharply out of one of the side streets, and passed rapidly before him. He caught a glimpse of the face as it flashed past him, and stood for a second as though he had received a blow; in a second he recovered himself, and hurried after her. She wound her way through the throngs of people that crowded the streets, as though she knew well where she was going. Once or twice, when she slackened her pace, he slackened his, but still took care to keep her always

in sight. On her arrival at Blenheim Steps, she paused, and looked about, evidently in search of some person whom she had expected to find there. She was apparently disappointed, and commenced slowly pacing up and down the pavement near the spot. Archibald concealed himself in a doorway, and watched the course of events. Anyone who had passed that way, and seen his face by the light of the gas-lamp, would have been struck by the pallor of his countenance, for he was pale, and his lips were pressed nervously together. He was not himself aware of the change that had come over him; nor could he have explained it, because he was unconscious of the feeling that actuated him. It was new, uncontrollable, and strange to him. He had fancied that he recognised the face, but he was not sure; he would wait till he heard the voice. Presently a matronly-looking woman—one of the respectable working-class, decently, though poorly dressed—crossed the road. The

young lady—for she was a lady, there was no mistaking that—hurried forward to meet her.

“Well, have you got it?” said the elder, eagerly.

“No,” answered the young lady, despondently; “I don’t think it is any use trying any more.”

The next few sentences were lost among the swarm of people that were flowing to and fro between them. Then they walked slowly on; Dundas followed, as near to them as circumstances permitted. They conversed together in such low tones, that many words escaped his hearing; and those he did hear, he only caught by scraps and snatches.

“Of course not,” replied the elder, in reply to some half whispered words; “I told you so before. You had better take my advice.”

“Yes—but it seems so strange. I shall feel so nervous, so ashamed to—” the rest of her speech was lost to him; he could only guess its import from her companion’s reply.

“That’s all nonsense—I shall be there; you needn’t be afraid, for, after all, I’ve got to do the worst part of the business.”

Again their voices were lowered, the next words he heard were—

“It is too early yet! between ten and eleven will be quite time enough.”

Some more disconnected sentences followed; he caught something about “the children’s supper” and “Jem’s tea.” The woman ended by inviting the young lady to accompany her, but she said wearily,

“No, thank you—I could not, I feel stifled in the house; besides, I can think better in the open air.”

The woman left her, and the young girl turned slowly round, and walked towards the Marble Arch. She went up one street and down another so rapidly, that Dundas was compelled, in following her, to throw off his lounging gait, and even then he had some difficulty in keeping her in sight. She was

evidently wandering without any professed object; for she passed and repassed the same place more than once, now slackening, then accelerating her speed, as though her thoughts were flying rapidly before her, and she was trying to overtake them. Presently he came up with her, and for a few yards walked step by step at her side. In a few minutes, by her hesitating, wavering way, it was evident she fancied she was being followed and watched. Suddenly she stopped, and looked round—Dundas saw her face, and recognised her fully. He stretched out his hand, and touched her shoulder, saying,

“Miss de Fontaine—Adrienne!”

A stifled cry broke from her lips, as she caught his words, and echoed the name—

“Adrienne? Who are you? How do you know me?” she exclaimed, startled by his first address—the next moment, recovering herself, she added coolly,

“I—my name is not—you are mistaken.”

“I really must apologise for doubting a lady’s word,” he said, raising his hat courteously; “but I do not think I am mistaken. You may have forgotten me, I am not surprised at that; but my memory is more retentive than yours. I have seen you twice—”

“Twice!” she muttered, in an under-tone.

“Yes,” he said slowly, as though watching the effect of his words; “once at the British Embassy in Paris; again, one Sunday morning, in the Village Church at Crofton.”

“Ah! I know you now!” exclaimed Adrienne, with a flushed cheek and sharp quick breath. She held out her hand to him, as she added, “You are changed—but still I recognise you—you are Captain Dundas.”

She seemed deeply affected by the meeting; but tried to put her agitation out of sight. She walked on with him by her side; she tried to speak of casual indifferent matters, with an easy self-possessed air, as though it were a perfectly natural and correct thing for a young lady of

her birth and breeding to be found roaming through the streets of London alone at that hour of the evening. Presently, in reply to one of her remarks, referring to their first meeting, he said,

“I dare say you wondered why you never saw me again, after that ball at the Embassy?”

“Yes—I—that is we, did wonder sometimes; but it did not matter. I got into great disgrace for dancing with you, and being with you so much that evening. It seems that I was committing a breach of all kinds of polite society rules.”

“Do you remember that evening?” he said, looking curiously into her face, as though to see how much she really did remember. “How we talked! What pleasant matters we wisely discussed! We—at least, *I* talked very foolishly, I remember. It was your first ball, I think.”

“Yes—and my last—my father died within

a month ;” her voice trembled slightly as she added quickly, “and all things have changed with me since then.”

Archibald Dundas knew exactly how far, and in what degree, things had changed ; he did not tell her so, but allowed her to go on in her own way, curious to see how much, or how little, she would reveal of her present position, and the state of affairs that surrounded her. More than once he looked down on her face, and smiled to see how hopelessly she was struggling to get away from the truth, that must be made known at last ; light, commonplace words fell heavily from her lips ; she seemed to feel that some mute inscrutable power was revolving round her, closing her in, closer and tighter every step she took. Ay, she might sharpen her wit, quicken her pace, and walk on to the world’s end, she must give in at last. Major Dundas—he had attained a step in his profession—regarded her with a strange feeling, which he would have found

difficulty in describing. The whole of their brief acquaintance had a strange significance in it. Each time they had met had been under uncommon circumstances. This was the strangest of them all. Where was it to end? Were they drifting upon the tide of life, gradually being borne far away from the beaten track? Wave upon wave of foaming fancies, and wild, wandering thoughts, now rolled over them, carrying their unwary souls farther and farther away from those safe and pleasant shores of life, into a wild, tumultuous sea, where the breakers are many, and the escapes from wreck and ruin few. They walked on, knowing nothing, realizing nothing of the threatened danger. Their spiritual eyes were blinded, they saw nothing but the outer current of life that was rolling round them, flowing onward with the thousand of pattering feet and changing faces of the multitude that streamed hither and thither beneath the gas-lights.

Archibald's present intention, so far as he could himself divine it, was to telegraph at once to Crofton the news that the fugitive was found. He was deeply interested in Adrienne, there was no doubt of that, and his interest increased with every step they took. He was anxious to see how, and by whom, the pages of the future, consisting of the next few hours, would be turned. She never mentioned Crofton, nor alluded either directly or indirectly to her home at the Manor-house. Of course their conversation was limited to few and trifling matters. Often they came to a dead pause, and walked on side by side silently for some minutes. He knew she must give in soon. He resolved that he would walk on with her, ay, even if they walked the whole night through, until he had learned more of her than she seemed inclined to tell. He felt a natural delicacy in making any inquiry into matters that concerned her only. Had he been an old friend of her family, things would have

been different; he would have taken the liberty of a friend, and spoken. But theirs was a mere casual acquaintance, commenced in a Paris ball-room, in an atmosphere of music and roses; renewed and ripening now beneath the gas-lights in the London streets, on a gloomy night.

She was getting restless and nervous, evidently anxious that he should leave her. Indeed, in her heart she was sorely distracted between two wills. She wished him to go, yet wished him to stay. She knew he must and ought to go, yet she dreaded the parting. His voice acted like a magic spell upon her, and carried her back to that brief bright hour, the first and the last time she had heard it. How well she remembered everything, even the most trifling fact connected with that meeting. His voice had been to her like the music of some unknown world. She had heard it but that once, and she had wandered so far through the world with a lingering longing to

hear it again. She heard it now. She felt like one walking and talking in a dream; but the dream must be dispelled, she must wake up, rouse herself, and shake off the sweet feeling and clinging fancies that were stealing over her. Her limbs ached; she was tired; she could not see distinctly; the gas-lights and the crowds of people seemed to be dancing before her in a whirling maze. More than once he saw that her steps faltered, as though she needed support. He offered his arm, and was refused. Suddenly, as they reached the Marble Arch for the second time, she stopped and said,

“I am afraid I have trespassed on your time too long—I will leave you now. Good night,” and as she spoke, she held a trembling hand out to him.

“What!” he exclaimed, “do you really expect me to leave you, at this hour of the night, alone in the public streets?”

“I do not expect you will remain with me a moment longer than I desire you

should." There was a haughtiness in her tone that seemed as if she was resolved to be obeyed.

"Under ordinary circumstances," he said, courteously, "a lady's will, in such a matter, has a right to be respected. In your case——"

"In my case," she repeated, interrupting him quickly, her sensitive nature giving a meaning to his words which he had never intended; she stopped in the middle of the pavement, and looked him full in the face, saying, "What do you mean?—what have I done to deserve to lose the right to be respected?"

"You misunderstand me—I have not accused you——"

"Accused me!—no!" she exclaimed, interrupting him again; "and if you did, I should not take the trouble to plead either guilty or not guilty—at least, to you."

"I shall not ask you—nor shall I intrude

on you one moment longer than I believe is necessary and right."

"And what made you a judge of what is right between us?" she said, impatiently; "I—I have been walking and talking with you too long, perhaps; but, now, as you are a gentleman, I beg you to leave me."

"As I am a gentleman, I cannot," replied Archibald, earnestly; "I must see you in safety for this night, at least. If you reflect a moment, Miss de Fontaine, you will see that I am right. I could not do otherwise than I am doing."

They walked on in silence a moment longer; then she said, with much dignity,

"If I were at home, in my mother's house, you would obey me and go. It is because I am alone here and unprotected——"

"Exactly," he said. "Without any abstruse calculation, you have arrived at my precise meaning. It is because you are alone and unprotected that I refuse to leave you, until

I have seen you safely to your home, wherever that home may be. I owe that duty to your friends at Crofton."

"Ah! I see you have been there, and heard everything."

"Yes, everything, as far as they could tell me."

She heard him, yet she made no answer, but walked on without a word—on through the dull streets, with busy thoughts buzzing about her brain. What could she do?—what could she say? It was no use to turn boldly round, face him, and attempt to drive him away with angry words, for he would not be driven. There was a strange, quiet perseverance in his manner, that told her he would have his way. Why was he interested in her? What was her fate to him? What right had he to try to penetrate the veil she had chosen to throw round her? There was a fluttering of pride at her heart—she could not bear that his eye should pierce through

the rough, ragged circumstances that covered her desolate life, and see the naked, shivering soul that was within her; yet, in spite of the poor, proud, struggling spirit, a ray of pleasure, a painful pleasure, perhaps, darted through every vein at the thought that he cared to know something more of her than she pleased to tell.

“I see you are resolved to play the spy,” she said at last; “very well, let it be so. I am hurrying now to keep an appointment. You may accompany me if you choose (for I see there is no help for it) to the place of meeting—there you will leave me, for I shall brook no further interference; as it is, you have gone too far.”

He bowed, and they walked on in utter silence. More than once her steps faltered, as though she could scarcely support herself. As they approached Blenheim Steps, the place where he had first seen her, “There is my friend,” she said; “I need trouble you no

further—you can have no objection to leave me now.”

Before he had time to answer her, she had moved abruptly away. He followed her with his eyes, and saw her rejoin the woman from whom she had parted about two hours before. He saw that a few hurried words passed between them, then the elder woman turned, as though to approach and address him; but at that moment Adrienne tottered and stretched out her hands blindly, as though to cling to something for support. Archibald thrust the woman unceremoniously from his path, sprang forward—in a second he had taken Adrienne in his arms, and carried her into the nearest shop. Her companion followed, muttering something he could not distinctly understand.

Adrienne had not fainted, as he had at first supposed. She had turned giddy, her head swam, and for a second she saw nothing but a black mist before her eyes. She never for a moment lost consciousness. They brought her a glass

of water, and she revived slowly. From the moment Major Dundas deposited her in the shop, he took no active part in the proceedings; he leaned back against the wall, silent, but observant of all that passed. Adrienne leaned her head against her companion, and as she recovered, the tears rolled slowly down her cheeks. The woman bent over her in a kind motherly way, and a few whispered words passed between them. She seemed shocked at some revelation Adrienne made, for she answered quickly,

“Forgot it, did you! No wonder you’re faintin’—I didn’t know ’twas as bad as that—you might ha’ come home and shared a crust with the children.”

A sharp pain shot through Archibald’s heart. He looked on the wan white face of the girl; he could observe her better now, in the well-lighted shop, than beneath the dim dusky glare of the public gaslights. He was shocked to see the hollow eyes and the dark circles round

them; the mouth, too, had a drawn painful expression; indeed, her whole faded look encouraged the terrible suspicion her companion's words created. Was it possible the young girl was suffering from long-enforced fasting? He sickened at the thought. He drew her companion aside, saying,

"I am a very old friend of that young lady's family, and I should be glad to be of any service to her; do you know where she lives? She should be taken home at once."


"I'll take her home along o' me, sir. My place is a poor one, but it's the only home she's got, poor dear!"

Major Dundas and the poor woman held a short conference together, which conference ended by his fetching a cab to the door. He assisted Adrienne and her companion in, then he mounted the box beside the driver, and, according to the instructions he had received, ordered him to drive to 17, Kirkman's Buildings.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST STEP.

“ Oh, it was pitiful !
Near a whole city full,
Home she had none.”

AJOR DUNDAS returned home that night, deeply impressed with his strange adventure. Adrienne's face, in its strange wan beauty, haunted him. He was pained and oppressed ; he could not bear to think of her, as he had left her, surrounded by vulgar poverty in its plain unvarnished garb ; no poetical drapery to cover its nakedness, nor surround it with fictitious interest, or glory that a great soul's poverty will sometimes wear. Her friends, evidently her only friends now,

were the decent poor, who talked to her in the coarse rough language of their class, with voices harsh and cracked with the wear and tear of life. He never reflected that the words they uttered might be sweet and tune-ful to her ears, their rough kindness more grateful to her heart, than the cold freezing refinements which had surrounded her all her life—for all the years it had been blighted. He was a man of refined tastes, and fastidious to a degree. He had a critical eye for all that was beautiful in art or nature; anything that deviated from that he passed by as worthless. He would rather have received an injury from a soft velvet claw, than a kindness from a rough, unskilful hand. Anything coarse or vulgar, that interrupted his generally harmonious view of life, annoyed him. If a poor distressed object crossed him in the public streets, with raw wounds or twisted withered limbs, his senses were shocked, and he would cross to the other side of the road—his sensitive na-

ture recoiling so far that he could not even stop to relieve it. Hence it was that he had been so struck, and was still haunted by the grim face of poverty, side by side with Adrienne's beauty; he had no power to discover its redeeming features. However, repulsive though it was, he had no intention of flying from that. He burned with curiosity to learn more than he knew now, for he was only cognizant of the one fact that would have been patent to all eyes, viz., her dependence upon the humble friends whose home she shared. He had left her at the door of the house in Kirkman's Buildings, having first given whispered instructions to Mrs. Bennett (for that was the woman's name) to care for her. Having provided her with the means of caring, he left her, with a promise to return in the morning.

How he longed for the morning to come! He, who was so cool and easy about most matters, was full of feverish excitement now;

his curiosity was doubly roused by the half-uttered confidences that passed between Adrienne and Mrs. Bennett when he had first observed them. He repeated their words over and over again, and pondered over their meaning; but he could not satisfy his mind by any definite conclusion—no matter, the morrow would disclose all. He sat gazing into his fire, with his usual mute companion, a cigar between his lips, finding out likenesses, and tracing out mysteries in the burning coal. Adrienne, or Lena, sometimes the two together, occupied all his thoughts. He tried to think of what he should do, what he should say to Adrienne when they met: what course of conduct he should pursue. Indeed, when he reflected, he fancied she might accuse him of undue interference already. What right had he to accompany her home, and make inquiries into her affairs? Nay, if she had even chosen to perish, what right had he to prevent her from following her own wild will?

His prevailing thought, as they were walking together, had been to restore her to her friends at Crofton. Now that he was alone, and had time to think, the question, "What friends?" suggested itself to his mind. Her mother had virtually disowned her; that is to say, she had taken no pains to discover and reclaim her. Even if he could induce Adrienne to return, Madame de Fontaine (with whose character he was well acquainted) might not be willing to receive her again in the home she had deserted. What other friends had she? The Carltons? Humph! After the young lady's late escapade, he was not quite sure that he should choose her to be the friend and companion of Lena Carlton. The more he thought the matter over, the more perplexed he grew. He could not decide upon what he ought to do; there was but one line of duty before him, and that he could not see. He had but a vague hazy notion of the matter. His table was covered with periodicals,

serials, and newspapers; he took up one after another, cutting the leaves, dipping first into this, then into that. Finding nothing interesting enough to attract his attention, he tossed them impatiently aside, and went to bed with only one perfectly defined idea, or rather fixed resolution—he would see Adrienne in the morning; make his suggestions to her; hear, and obey her wishes.

He ought to have written to Lena that night; but he was undecided what to say to her; he could not make up his mind whether or not he ought to mention his meeting with Adrienne. She had called him a spy, and his cheeks tingled as he recalled the bitter tone in which she had uttered the word. He rose up in the morning, more at ease than he had been overnight; he resolved that when he wrote to Crofton, he would make no allusion to his adventure, and he kept his word. As soon as he thought a visit would be permissible, he started for Kirkman's Buildings.

It was a wide-paved court, leading out of Tottenham Court Road; a locality quite new to him, for he had seen but little of the homes of the busy working world. A dingy, miserable place it seemed to him, though in reality it was considered rather an aristocratic neighbourhood by those who abode there. It was inhabited chiefly by skilled artisans, and one or two threadbare merchant's clerks, who, with their wives and families, starved genteelly on fifty pounds a year; the majesty of law and order, too, was duly represented by Mr. James Bennett, X 95, whose proudest boast was that "no street labourers nor costers had ever set up their tent in Kirkman's Buildings."

Major Dundas's visit had fallen on a Sunday morning, and the whole of the Building seemed to be turned inside out, for every door was open, and the lord of the mansion lounged on the steps, in all the luxury of clean linen, with shirt-sleeves rolled up, and a pipe in his mouth, chatting with his neigh-

bours; while the numerous offspring of the Buildings sprawled in the doorways, or made dirt-pies in the gutter. It is to be hoped that some few had heard the Church bells, and obeyed their summons; but morning service, as a rule, is not patronised by the working classes. The men like to enjoy their homes, and the delights of a few brief hours of idleness, one day out of seven. The women give an extra scrubbing to their children and their homes, and prepare a savoury dinner—some rare luxury, perhaps; while a dessert of stale stall fruit, bought for a few pence, gives additional glory to the feast. In the evening they may think of better things, put on their smart clothes and go to Church; but if the smart clothes be wanting, they prefer staying at home, and won't go out at all.

It was near dinner-time when Major Dundas turned into the Buildings. Judging from the combined savoury odours that greeted him, he fancied the whole court must be regaling

itself extensively on cabbage and onions ; the rank odour of these popular but not pleasant vegetables, seemed to fume out of the doorways, out of the windows, and even to ascend in hot steaming clouds from the open grating in the court, as he crossed the gutter. Faugh ! it was horrible ; he held his breath, and hurried on to No. 17. There, at the door, with a huge key on her finger, and a huge baking-dish, with the family-dinner fresh from the oven, in her hands, stood Mrs. Bennett herself, looking more coarse-featured, more blowsy, and more good-tempered by day than by night. He made her a polite bow, and, in dropping him a curtsey in reply, she nearly upset her savoury dinner. He saw that she was embarrassed and encumbered, and could not open her door ; he took the huge key from her hand, opened the door for her, and stepped aside for her to enter. Obeying her invitation, he followed her up the stairs. The room was wretched enough in his eyes, but appeared brighter and more

comfortable than it had done on the previous night, by the flickering glare of a rush candle. A pleasant fire was burning in the grate, and everything looked as though it had been freshly scrubbed and furbished up in honour of the day; even the children seemed to have received an additional polish with soap and water, as they tumbled one over the other in their struggle to stare at the stranger. The cloth was laid for dinner; as Archie's eye fell on the preparations for the banquet, he wondered if Adrienne was going to sit down and share it. The idea of her sitting down there, wielding those awkward black-handled knives and two-pronged forks, and regaling on that roast pork and onions, slightly disgusted him; he looked round, but saw no signs of her presence; he was not sorry for that, and was glad to speak to the mistress of the house alone. She, poor woman, overwhelmed him with apologies, for herself, her children, her humble home, and even for her dinner; she wound up

by calling his attention to the limp emblems of Mr. Bennett's public dignity, which were hung up, staff and all, behind the door, informing him, at the same time, that James was "a-cleanin' hisself," as he never liked to "set down otherwise when Miss Hadrian was there, who wouldn't be very long before she was in."

"She is not at home, then?" said Archibald, inquiringly, glad to get in a word, and hear Adrienne's name at last.

"Well, no, sir, not exactly. She's gone to the Abbey, and took our Aggie with her. Aggie's stone blind, sir," she added, her voice unconsciously becoming lower and softer as she spoke of her child's affliction, "and Miss Hadrian's that kind to her, as me and James'll never forget. She takes her to hear the grand organ play, and shows her the monuments and the angels—leastways, describes 'em to her, so beautiful, you'd think it was a book a-talkin'."

Mrs. Bennett's attention was attracted to her children, some of whom, taking advantage of

the temporary derangement of affairs, had surrounded the savoury dish, and were busily scraping the crackling, and licking their fingers and lips to their hearts' content. She flew at them, cuffing one, scolding another, and having driven them from the room, returned to Major Dundas, apologizing again.

"I am very glad to have an opportunity of seeing you alone for a few minutes," he said. "I want to know how you first became acquainted with Miss de Fontaine?"

"It was James, sir, not me, as become acquainted with her first—such a perfect lady, too, and so all the Building says; though it did talk a little at first, as was quite natural."

"Talk about what?" exclaimed Archie, impatiently.

"Miss Hadrian, of course, sir, though it's not the sort of thing James is in the habit of doing; for he's been nigh twenty years in the force, and there's not a single mark against his character, either morally or otherwise."

Archibald thought that if Mr. Bennett's moral character was brought under discussion, he should find some difficulty in coming back to Adrienne, so taking advantage of a slight pause in Mrs. Bennett's defence, he said,

"I have no doubt—indeed, I am quite sure that your husband is a most estimable man, and an honour to the force."

"You may well say that, sir."

"But about Miss de Fontaine?"

"That's just what I'm coming to, sir; as I said before, it's the first time that James has ever done such a thing, and when I saw him standin' there, with a beautiful young lady by his side, you might have knocked me down with a feather; the tears was rollin' down her cheeks, and she looked as white as a ghost. It's very lucky it happened on my James's beat, or I don't know what might have become on her."

Major Dundas was getting into a very fever of excitement.

"My good woman," he said, "for God's sake speak out!"

"Well, sir, here's my husband, and I dare say he can tell you a deal better than I can,"—she turned to him as he was just entering the room, and added, with an explanatory smile, "this gentleman is Miss Hadrian's friend, James dear—him as I told you about last night."

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Bennett, looking at Dundas with a scrutinizing eye, as though he were going to take him into custody the next minute. Archibald thought that, having a man to deal with, he might, without much circumlocution, arrive at the plain facts; therefore, shaking hands with Mr. Bennett, he expressed his anxiety to know how Miss de Fontaine was so fortunate as to fall into such kind hands. The story was soon told—X 95 spoke, standing bolt upright before him, as though he had been giving evidence before the bench.

"I was on my beat, sir, nigh Fitzroy

Square, 'tween two and three in the morning, when a young lady runned past me and knocked at the door of No. 17. It was a long time afore it was opened, then she stood a minute or two talking to somebody inside. I stood at the corner, to see what kem of it. Presently the door was slammed to, and the young lady turned from the door, sobbin' as though her heart would break; then she walked slowly on a little afore, I follerin' to see what was up. When she got to a dark place, she sat down on the cold stones, rockin' herself back'ards and for'ards, cryin' bitterly. I spoke to her then, and when she lifted up her head and I saw her face, I think I'd never seen a mortal being with such a white, frightened look. I told her she must move on—as was my duty, sir—it seems she'd nowhere to move to, for she said piteously,

“‘I'm only sitting here to think—I don't know where to go.’

“I asked her a few questions, which, her

answers bein' satisfactory, I brought her home to my missis here; for, as I said, my place is humble, but it's honest, and she'll get safe shelter there, if she gets nothing else. I couldn't ha' left her there, sir, nor ha' taken her to the station-house, if I'd been paid for it; but it wasn't right for her to be wanderin' about the public streets, such a beautiful young cretur as she is too, you can't deny that; and if you're a friend of her fam'ly, as you say you are, the sooner you get her back to it the better."

"How long is this ago?" inquired Archibald.

"Nigh upon three months."

"And have you supported her all that time?" he exclaimed, in amazement.

"Well, no—we can't say that, sir," broke in the wife; "seven mouths to feed on twenty-two shillings a week, and nothing extra, but doctor's stuff, won't allow us to be generous. She had a few pounds when she first kem

to us, and she eked that out as long as she could; since then she've lived on her bits o' trinkets, and hard livin' it's been. I used to think her myster'ous at first, for so sure as meal-times come round, she'd always find something to go out for. She's a real lady, you see, sir, and couldn't bear to take the bread out o' the children's mouths—not but what she'd ha' been welcome to a crust as long as there was one in the cupboard."

"It's a very hard thing for a lady to get her bread," said Mr. Bennett; "them as can work hard and rough it, gets on well enough; but when a born lady's thrown on the world, I say, God help her!"

"And she've walked her shoes off her feet lookin' for some proper employment—a young lady like her can't take no other; and only last night——"

"What about last night?" exclaimed Archibald, eagerly; "I overheard part of your conversation."

“Well, sir, it’s not azactly the thing we should choose for a young lady to do, but when nothin’ ever turns up except disappointments continual, it was me that advised Miss Hadrian to do it. She seemed shy and ashamed at first, but last night she promised to try it.”

“To try what? My good woman, pray speak out,” said Archibald, getting wondrously impatient.

“Why don’t you tell the gentleman plain out?” said the husband. “The fact is, sir, Miss Hadrian was goin’ to sing opposite the club-house winders; it’s honest, you know, and she might ha’ got a good livin’ at it. My missis was goin’ with her, to look after her, and see as nobody said nothin’ onsulting to her, and take the money, and all that. You see, sir, it’s getting rather hard on us; we can’t let the poor thing starve, and we can’t rightly afford to do otherways.”

It was terrible to Major Dundas to hear of

Adrienne's sad plight. What she must have suffered—what humiliations of the flesh—what martyrdom of the spirit, before she could bring herself down to this! To live with, to be pitied, advised, and compassionated by these coarse, vulgar people, who spoke bad grammar, and regaled themselves on cabbages and onions, and had at last advised her to sing on the public streets! Faugh! Indignation and disgust for a moment overpowered all other feelings. He thought nothing of the emergency, saw nothing of the true charity—the beauty of human kindness—that prompted them to extend the shelter of their rough home to the forlorn girl, and even made her welcome to the “children's crust.” The warm tenderness of their hearts was, in his eyes, trampled down by the vulgar utterance of their tongues. His whole soul, in its cold refinement, recoiled from all he saw and heard. More than once, since he had entered the Bennetts' home, he wished he had allowed Adrienne to pass by unrecognised.

Why had he spoken to her at all? He was silent; his thoughts flew back to Crofton; he remembered all he had heard of the sad life Adrienne had lived in her melancholy home; things might be changed now, if she could be induced to return to it. He thought of the grateful welcome he should get at the Rectory if he could succeed in bringing the wanderer back. But if he should not succeed—and after what he had heard of the young lady's wilful nature, he was forced to admit there was a doubt on the subject—how would the matter stand then? He felt that, in acting as he had done, he had placed himself in an awkward predicament, and more than half repented that he had allowed his impulse to guide him. He had come forward as her friend, yet what could he do to befriend her? Urge her to return home? Alas! if all the sufferings and privations she had endured, the humiliations of her present life, and the future that frowned grimly before her—if all this

failed to subdue her wilful spirit, and compel her to return home, how could he hope that his persuasions would prevail? What should he do?—what could he do? She was evidently in great need; her welcome, even in this rude home, was rapidly wearing out; the wonder was that it had lasted so long. The poor folk, in their warm compassion, had taken her in, done all they could for her, even let her share their children's bread; now she must do for herself. It is an easy thing to wear out a welcome, even among rich friends and loving relatives; the enthusiastic reception gradually cools down to polite courtesy, declining, if we do not take the hint and begone, to bare civility. Having passed a few pleasant days or hours together, however charming we may be, we grow weary of one another; we have travelled over each other's minds, without wishing to linger on any particular spot, or to retrace our steps, and unless we speedily part company, we become mutually bored—having

met as friends, we part as mere acquaintances. Of course there are many exceptions. If this be the case among the refined and gentler classes, how much stronger we must expect to find that feeling among the poor and humble! Yet it is not so; out of their little they will often give more freely than their richer brethren out of their abundance. For three whole months the Bennetts had extended their kind hospitality to Adrienne; every day she had taken a crumb of comfort from their crowded home, a place at their table, a nook by their fireside—in fact, her presence as a stranger must utterly have destroyed the privacy of home. What wonder was it that their welcome, after such long usage, was nearly worn out? They did not say so much in words, but with his own eyes Dundas could see the truth.

While he was cogitating within himself what he should say, how he should advise Adrienne, she came in from Church, leading

blind Aggie by the hand. He gazed earnestly on Adrienne's face, and marvelled to see how wondrously she had changed. How worn and jaded she looked, poor wind-beaten flower, the rich glow had faded from her cheeks, and the brightness of her smile was gone; as her face had grown thin and pale, her eyes looked doubly large, doubly bright. Sorrow had stolen away the rich colour and roundness of youth; but there remained a marvellous statuesque beauty of features, that time only could destroy, and that but slowly. The red blood rushed to her cheeks, they burned with a hot crimson flush, as her eyes and Archibald's met, here in the open day. She looked as though she would drop for shame; letting little Aggie's hand fall, she stood still and looked at him without uttering a word. On such an occasion as this, of course all ceremony fell to the ground; no unnecessary courtesies could pass between them; circumstanced as they were, they must deal

with plain facts, naked truths. Speaking to her in French, Dundas proposed that they should go out and talk at their ease, as he must have some serious conversation with her before they parted.

"We can talk here, if you wish it," she said, walking languidly to a bench in the window; "they will not understand us, and I am too tired to walk out again."

"There is no necessity for you to walk," he said, eagerly, "we can drive to Hampstead, to Blackwall, or to Richmond, if you prefer it—anywhere, so that we can talk quietly. Indeed, I think you will be all the better for a little fresh air; you look as if you needed it."

A little of the old music seemed playing in Adrienne's ears, a gleam of the old fire lighted up her eyes, and a shadowy smile rippled gradually over her face. The old tender longing rose up in her heart, lifting the cloud from her spirit, the heaviness from her

limbs. Her old sunny nature, in all its wilful wildness, woke up as from a long benumbing sleep. It seemed that all her dark night wanderings, the cold, the real horrors of poverty she had undergone, had been a kind of nightmare, an evil dream, that was rapidly passing away, dispelled by the magic of his tender eyes, and kindly voice, as he stood there, ready to take her out from the gloom into the sunshine. Like many people of a warm excitable temperament, Adrienne never looked beyond the present hour of enjoyment; easily excited, easily depressed, she felt keenly, either joy or sorrow, while it lasted; when it past, it was forgotten. At the present moment, she had only the one thought, how much he must care for her, to leave his own bright prosperous world, and dive down into that poor labour-stained home in search of her! What was she to him, that he should do so much for her? The idea of passing a whole day with him, brought with it a soft delicious

feeling of joy; she never reflected that the pleasant day would pass away; the sunshine die out of the sky, and the shadows of gloom and darkness close over her, even as they had closed yesterday, and many days before. The prudence or propriety of starting for a day's excursion, so accompanied, never for a moment entered her thoughts; she only knew that the prospect was delightful, that she should have one day's respite from care, at least. She held out her hand to him, and said, with a tender blush upon her cheeks,

"I will go with you, anywhere you please—you are so kind. I shall be glad to hear what you have to say, though I don't think you can do me any good."

"We shall see," replied Major Dundas, as he prepared to go, first thanking the Bennetts for their civility to him, and their kindness to Adrienne; somehow he felt as though he had a right to thank them for that. Mrs. Bennett, who was greatly impressed by Archi-

bald's elegant exterior and general agreeability, was profuse in her offers of hospitality; but her husband did not seem quite satisfied to let their young guest slip away so uncere- moniously from their fireside.

He screwed up his mouth, and eyed Major Dundas with stern official eyes, as though making a mental survey of his character. Archibald fancied he was about to make some vulgar remonstrance against her going, and was prepared to hurl back a thundering reply, when Adrienne's soft voice crept in between them; addressing Archibald, with a half hesita- ting, bashful face, she said,

"Little Aggie will miss me sadly—I always read to her, or tell her stories on a Sunday afternoon."

She took the child's hand in hers, and held it firmly as she spoke, looking beseechingly in his face the while. He saw in a moment the kindly wish she did not like to express.

"You would like the child to go with

you?" he said. "Certainly, let it be so."

Her beaming look told him better than words could have done how heartily she thanked him. The parents overwhelmed him with gratitude. Poor little Aggie, the most afflicted, was the pet-lamb of the flock. All their rougher nature softened towards her. She had never heard an unkind word, and even their coarse hands touched her tenderly and lightly, as though she might be soiled and broken by common usage. She had lived a dull, dreamy child-life, until Adrienne came among them; she had seemed to burst like a spirit of light upon the child's darkened senses—for with Adrienne's advent little Aggie's more refined and spiritual life began to blossom and bear fruit—her weird thoughts found words. Nestling by Adrienne's side, she would lift up her sightless eyes, and tell her of the wonderful things she dreamed, and the glorious things she saw in that shadowy land, where her spirit, untrammelled, was free to wander and

to see. The blind child and the forlorn girl had learned to love one another. Archie's willingness to let Aggie accompany Adrienne gave unmitigated satisfaction to all parties. The two whispered together for a moment; Adrienne seemed embarrassed, and laughed, shook her head, and said,

"No, Aggie, no; I cannot ask that."

"What is it?" inquired Archibald.

The child fearlessly lifted her head, and answered,

"I want to feel your face, that I may know what you are like."

Major Dundas was in a most amiable mood. Inspired by Adrienne's presence, encouraged by her eloquent grateful glances, he was ready to say or do anything that would best please her. In a second he was kneeling at her side; he shook the rich luxuriant curls from his forehead, and gazed into Adrienne's blushing face as she guided the child's hand to his, and left it lying lightly on his broad

expansive brow. Aggie leant earnestly over him, as though she was engaged in a matter of the deepest importance, passing her hand slowly over his upturned face. They all looked on, silently watching and waiting to hear what she would say.

"Yes," she murmured in an undertone, as though speaking to herself, "I know exactly what he is like. He is like the smell of violets."

The expedition to Richmond, for thither they resolved to go, was a wondrously pleasant one; indeed, so pleasant, that for a time Major Dundas forgot the grave business that was pending—he did not know where to begin or how to bring it about, and Adrienne seemed resolved not to help him. She was shy and silent during the journey down, but the soft fresh air and the pleasant scenery surrounding Richmond Hill seemed to have an invigorating effect on her spirits; she regained some of her old elasticity. She talked

very little to him, but a great deal to the child, making quaint remarks, and describing the pretty home-view, with the river Thames winding like a silver thread through the meadows, in such sweet poetical language, that Archibald shut his eyes and listened; he fancied he saw the picture better through her eyes than through his own. Before the day was half over, he wished fifty times that the child had been left at home; he grew angry, some people might have said jealous, of the attention Adrienne paid to the blind girl. As he looked on her beautiful face, bathed in the bright sunshine, he could hardly believe it was the same that had looked so faded and worn a few hours ago.

They dined at the Hotel, and in the evening sat watching the twilight deepening into night. Aggie was tired out with the unusual excitements of the day, and nestled down with her arms round Adrienne's waist, burying her head in the folds of her dress.

There had been a pause of some few minutes. Archibald was getting up his courage to march to the attack, when Adrienne herself held out her hand to him, and broached the business herself, saying,

“I hope you will forgive me for having seemed so happy to-day, but I could not help it. It may be a long time before I have such another.” A slight sigh escaped from her as she added, “I suppose we must talk seriously now—well, go on; I will listen to anything you wish to say.”

Strange as it may seem, as the day wore on, Archibald Dundas had grown less and less inclined to speak of that which had at first been his sole object in seeking Adrienne out. Now, as she rested her beautiful eyes upon his face, and waited for him to speak, he felt abashed, and perhaps for the first time in his life he was at a loss for words. At last he said,

“I am going to write down to Crofton, to our friends; I should like to give them some

satisfactory news of you—or, better still, I will go down, if you will permit me to accompany you.”

“No,” she answered, decidedly; “I will never go down to Crofton again—never—I would rather die here!”

“But you can’t die when you please,” he said, gravely. “You must wait till your time comes. You must live, and life has many miseries, worse, far worse than you know of yet. It is easier and better for you to return home humble and repentant.”

“I am not humble, I am not repentant,” she answered, proudly. “If I were dragged back, and bound with chains, if I could, I would break them all, and do again as I have done now.”

“But, Adrienne, think of all you have suffered!”

“I would rather suffer all, or worse, if worse could be, than stand before my mother’s cold cruel face again. I would fly from that to the

end of the world, or even hide myself in my grave. So I warn you, Major Dundas, do not play the traitor's part, and betray me to those you call my friends. Give me your word, and I will trust you."

He promised that he would make no communications to Crofton without her consent. Looking earnestly on her face, he added,

"But what will you do? You cannot live on those poor people always!"

"Oh! no; but I shall do very well now. I was very proud at first, and fancied I should do great things in London. But that kind of pride is quite gone, and," she added, quickly, "I am going to sing; it seems that I cannot get my bread with my hands, they tell me I can with my voice—it doesn't matter."

"But it does matter!" exclaimed Archibald, greatly excited, for he fancied he saw her surrounded by such fast company as infest the London streets by night, heard her ears offended by loose language, saw her eyes dis-

gusted by unseemly sights, her person exposed in her marvellous beauty to the gaze of debauched, dissolute men, and unsexed women, who despised her innocence, and envied her beauty. "You cannot—you shall not do anything of the kind," he said, in much excitement.

"Who shall prevent me?" she exclaimed, in alarm.

"I! Listen, Adrienne, I will not stand by and see you, a gentlewoman born and bred, take a step that may degrade you in your own eyes, and in the eyes of the world for years to come. Wait—promise me, at least, that you will do nothing rashly. Give me time to think for you. You are very young, very inexperienced."


There was something in his face, or in his tone, as he spoke, that touched Adrienne to the quick. She burst into tears.

"You are too good—too kind," she sobbed. "I can never repay your goodness—never!"

CHAPTER IV.

MORNING RED AND EVENING GREY.

“Father in Heaven! Why was the lot of this weak and erring child so hard? What had she done, to be so tempted in her weakness, and perish? Why didst thou suffer her gentle affections to lead her thus astray?”

OR some days following the excursion to Richmond, Archibald Dundas was a constant visitor at the Bennetts' home; scarcely a day passed that he did not find some special business to transact with Adrienne, some suggestion to make, or some small fact to communicate. Although he generally timed his visits towards the dusk of the evening, yet the inhabitants of the Buildings were perfectly awake to his coming and going, and had woven a brilliant

romance round the unconscious pair, indulging in a sort of hazy notion that they should one day see Adrienne, smothered in lace and flowers, disappear in a coach and six. By degrees Archibald seemed to become aware of the unpleasant surveillance he was undergoing; the men greeted him with a broad grin, and the women curtsyed and smiled significantly as he passed; one bolder and merrier than the rest, with a chubby child in her arms, bade him "Good evening," and "wished him luck!" This forced his disgust to the culminating point; he would have committed the whole Building to the flames, Bennetts and all, if he could only have saved Adrienne from the ruins. As it was, he bit his lip angrily, and strode on, inwardly resolving that he would go there no more. As soon as he entered the room, Adrienne saw there was a cloud upon his brow, and anxiously inquired if she had done anything to displease him. He satisfied her easily on that point, adding that he had

been vexed and worried with business matters all day. He said, smiling,

“And I have been occupied partly with your business too, Adrienne.”

They had fallen quite naturally into the habit of calling one another by their Christian names; the strange circumstance which had brought them together rendered all conventional formality impossible, and carried them by a short cut to an advanced stage of intimate companionship. When he spoke of being engaged with her business, she looked at him with something like anxious fear in her face, saying—

“You have not broken your word?”

He did not give her time to say another word, but hastened to allay her anxiety, saying earnestly,

“No, do not be alarmed—I could not do anything that would cause you a moment's pain. Believe me, Adrienne—you will believe me, will you not?—I would not vex you for the whole

world. Your welcome, and your bright smiling face, are becoming dearer to me every hour. I count every day as one day lost, if it does not bring me here to this grimy place, which you make so beautiful in my eyes.”

He spoke with a passionate impulse, which, for the moment, was ungovernable, and swept away all prudent thoughts or cooler calculations. He admired Adrienne as he admired everything that was beautiful to look at. He was captivated, too, by the *naïveté* with which she enjoyed the most trifling pleasures. Her impetuous character, with its many ennobling qualities, wilful petulances, and sweet womanly sympathies, was a new and charming study for him. He saw, too, how dear, how dangerously dear, he had already become to her; but he had not the power—probably not the inclination—to dissolve the spell. She was too unskilled, too innocent, to conceal the joy she felt at his coming, and her grief at his going away. She never combated with the sentiment

she felt for him—indeed, she never gave it a name, nor cared to think where it would lead her, or where it would end. Perhaps, if she had looked at it with an unprejudiced eye, and called it “Love,” she might have seen her danger, become frightened, and fled from it in terror. If she had been disciplined by the world, and had been versed in the cold calculating creed of society, that believes not in love, but weighs it in a trader’s scales with weights of golden expectations and leaden realities, she might have been wiser; but being almost friendless—without much wrong, it might be said motherless—ignorant of her own heart; confiding in others, it is no wonder that she had learned to love, with a strong, unconscious love, the man who had come forward and stretched out his hand to save her when she was sinking in a sea of misery, and the waves had almost closed over her. She little thought that every look she gave him, every word she uttered, every graceful movement she made,

even the clinging touch of her soft hand, betrayed her love to him, from whom she, woman-like, would have concealed it. She fancied that she felt only gratitude—that absorbing virtue, peculiar to humanity, necessarily unknown to the divinity. She gave herself up to the delicious feeling that was creeping, like subtle incense, into her very life, and luxuriated in its intensity. Archibald Dundas read in all her acts the proofs of her growing tenderness; he watched it deepening every day, every hour, until the brightness of her whole existence seemed concentrated in him. When he was away, all colour and animation died out of her life. It was a ravishing occupation for him to watch the gradual unfolding of this passion-flower of her life; to inhale its fragrance, and be dazzled by its beauty. It was an absorbing study, that budding and blossoming of her young affections. He viewed with rapture each tender shoot stretching out and clinging to him. He saw that the first fruits of her warm pas-

sionate nature—fresh and pure as the bloom on the butterfly's wing—were ripening for him. Was it a wonder that he came daily to watch its growth and give it tending? He spoke truth when he said, "the day was lost in which he did not see her face." He had never before spoken to her in such warm words, nor looked at her with such an expression in his eyes; her own sank beneath it. It was not often that Archibald Dundas verged from the straight line of prudence. He had been guilty of fewer follies and imprudences than most young men of his age; perhaps it would be nearer the truth to say he had guarded more effectually against their results. He saw that he had been hurried into a warmer expression than he intended, and became alarmed at his unguarded position. He tried to recover himself by adroitly shifting the conversation.

"You know I am your adopted brother, Adrienne," he said, "and as such I have a right to set my little sister's worldly affairs in

order. I have been thinking of you a great deal; and do you know the result of my cogitations? No—well, I have come to the conclusion that it is advisable for you to leave this place.”

“Why?” she exclaimed, with a startled look in his face. “And if I leave here, where am I to go? This is the only home, the only shelter I have got.”

“You look as though you would be almost grieved to leave this wretched place!” he answered, amazed.

“Wretched!” looking round her as she repeated his word; “well, I dare say it does seem wretched to you; but to me it has been—it is a blessed place. You look scornful; but to understand what I feel, you must know what I suffered before I found this refuge. I shall never forget that dreadful night—so cold, gloomy, and dark; I was a stranger in a strange place, and among the thousands of happy homes, there was no room for me;

among the multitudes I saw around me, *I* had not a single friend—not one who would have cared if I had been trampled down and flung into the river! When I was brought home here, this ‘wretched place’ seemed like a perfect heaven to me.”

“Under the circumstances,” he said, interrupting her, “I can quite understand your giving a free scope to your imagination, and even stretching it so far as to give this diabolical dwelling a tinge of celestial glory. But facts are stubborn things, Adrienne, and you must admit that it is not exactly the thing for *you* to huddle down among these people with their score of children. They may be all very respectable in their way, but they surely are not fit companions for you. Remember the old saying, Adrienne, ‘You cannot touch pitch without defiling your fingers.’ On the same ground, you cannot associate constantly with coarse, vulgar people without losing a portion of your own grace and re-

finement; deteriorating gradually, until your thoughts, and even your habits, become in time vulgarized and corroded."

Poor Adrienne's cheeks tingled; she blushed, partly from vexation, partly from shame. She could not exonerate her friends from his impairing charge, except by saying that what seemed coarse vulgarity to him was the common manners and customs of their class.

But that was not the point, he answered; the question was, were they fit and proper associates for her, looking at the question from a social point of view, without taking into consideration her need, or their kind charity? Again Adrienne spoke with fervid eloquence of their warm hearts and all their goodness to her; but he interrupted her impatiently.

"Yes!—yes!" he exclaimed; "I have no doubt they possess the warmest hearts in the world, and it is all very right for you to be grateful and repay their kindness."

"That I can never do!" she exclaimed;

"they will never know one half I feel, for my tongue could never tell one half the gratitude of my heart—words are weak, they could not express it."

"You must repay them with something better, more tangible than words, Adrienne. I agree with you, words are weak, but a wonderful power of expression lies in a ten-pound note; it is an argument that rarely fails to convince. You might talk for ever, and your gratitude would still remain 'not proven;' but the evidence of a ten-pound note is all-convincing—it is, in fact, proof positive of a grateful heart. Words too often prove nothing but their own worthlessness—they are mere air-bubbles, that burst and are gone."

"Not always!" exclaimed Adrienne; "words sometimes wound sharper than a sword; sometimes they are the best blessings and comforters God sends us. *You* have never thirsted for a kind word; *I* have, and I know best what a kind word is worth."

“I speak of the windy effervescence of wordy gratitude. Depend upon it, these people would rather receive payment in golden coin than in golden phrases, though you were to coin them out of your heart’s best blood. Your grateful words will not put bread in the cupboard, nor clothes on the children’s back. Money will do both.”

“Yes, I know that, and they are often in great need, for the children are so badly off for clothes, and—”

She commenced eagerly, and was going to enter into details respecting the state of the Bennetts’ domestic affairs generally, their wants, wishes, and expectations; but there was something in the expression of Archibald’s face that effectually checked the warm impulse that would have sent their wants tripping from her tongue. Adrienne saw that he was impatient, and disinclined to give any sympathy to them or their troubles, so she added quietly,

“I should be so glad if I could do them

any good—" she brightened up, as by a sudden thought, she added, "You know I am past nineteen now, and when I am twenty-one I shall be tolerably rich—I think. My father left all his property to me on my coming of age; and the first, the very first thing I shall do, will be to make the Bennetts comfortable. Aggie shall live with me; she shall learn music, and have flowers, and everything that can make a blind life happy. It must be so dreadful to be dark, to see no sunshine, and hear only the empty voices of those they love. Our souls may see their souls, but the beauty that glorifies a beloved face they can never behold; it must be as a sealed book to them."

"That must be hard indeed," he said, gazing at her admiringly, and smiling at her warmth, "especially if the face is worth looking at."

"Love makes every face beautiful. I am sure, if I had a toad that loved me, I should think it a perfect creature."

“Until you found out your mistake, then you would crush it beneath your foot. Cruel that; and for no fault of the poor toad’s.”

“What a horrible idea!”

“But seriously, Adrienne, I think it would be a good thing if we could all be blind, deaf, or dumb, as prudence or occasion demanded.”

“I should think we might all use our discretion about that. If we don’t like a thing, we need not look at it; if we don’t want to speak, we can hold our tongues; we can be deaf even to the voice of the thunder, if it please us. I am sure we are mostly deaf to the voice of conscience.”

“I don’t know, mine never speaks to me above a whisper,” he answered; “and as for discretion, we cannot always be so discreet as we would wish. Indeed, I don’t think I am particularly wise in seeing you so much and so often; if I were discreet, I should stay away, and yet I cannot use my discretion.”

Her spirit took the alarm at once ; she seemed to recognise in his words a disguised warning that their pleasant familiar intercourse must have an end. His words fell upon her like a blow ; as the first bitter blast of wind foretells that the winter is coming, with its frost and snows, and desolation, deadening the dancing waters, crushing the life out of the fair flowers, stripping the trees of their foliage, and the skies of the bright sunshine. He had brought into her life all the charms, the spiritual joys of existence ; she felt it would be bare and barren when his footsteps died out of it. His passing words gave her a glimpse of the dreary prospect. In spite of her proud endeavour to seem composed, and to hide the commotion within her breast that his words had created, her lips would quiver, and her voice tremble, as she said,

“I knew it would be so one day ; things could not thus go on happily for ever. I knew there must be an end to your coming

and going; but I did not think it would come so soon, and—I am hardly strong enough to bear it yet.”

“Dear Adrienne,” he said, taking her hand, and speaking softly and tenderly, “of course all things have an end; it is their very brevity, and the uncertainty of human joy, that makes it so precious; we all snatch the passing moments as they fly. But as to our parting——”

“Oh! I know all about that,” she exclaimed, interrupting him with the impatience of great grief, “I knew you had something dreadful to say the moment you entered the room; I read it in your face.”

“Did you?” he said; “I do not think you read it rightly. Certainly, nothing of our parting was written there—at least, not yet.”

Her face brightened, as though she had received a reprieve from some certain calamity. He was not slow in observing the sudden change, and added, in a frank, friendly tone,

"I cannot leave you, Adrienne, until I have seen you in a straight and pleasant path; then, if you will it, our two ways shall separate."

"If I will it!" she repeated, in a tone that showed she considered such a will impossible.

"Or circumstances command it," he rejoined.

"Ah, that is a different thing."

"You were right when you said that I looked full of grave business when I entered the room," he added, "for I was grave. I have been puzzling my brain as to the best means of extricating you from your present exceptional position."

"I am very willing to do anything I can," said Adrienne, looking confused and uncomfortable; "I had no idea it would be so difficult to live. You seemed to think it would be a degradation, and advised me not to——"

"Oh, that proposition was sheer folly," he

said, interrupting her quickly; "but I will tell you what I was thinking of, Adrienne. If you will give me leave to negotiate for you, I will see your father's executors, and endeavour to make some arrangement for them to allow you sufficient for your present need out of the abundance that will in the space of two short years be yours." The name of her father's executors seemed to strike terror into Adrienne's heart; she fancied that the full weight and majesty of the law would be marshalled against her; the dread of its unknown and, to her simple mind, unlimited power made her cheek turn pale. She hinted her fears to him; he laughed them down, telling her that he would take all trouble, all responsibility off her hands. He would arrange the programme; she should take the benefit. He gave her a brilliant sketch of his proposed plan of proceeding; of his skirmish and success over parchment, sealing-wax, and red tape; he appeared perfectly sanguine as to the result, and when she sug-

gested that all his wisest endeavours might possibly fail, he only smiled and said,

“Leave the business in my hands, and it shall all go well. You will trust me, Adrienne, will you not?”

A flush of gratitude suffused her cheeks, she held out both her hands to him, saying,

“Trust you, yes; if my life were concerned I would trust you fully, blindly, even with that. I can never thank God enough for having sent me such a friend.”

“You know I advise you only for your good,” he said, looking down upon her eloquent face. “I dare say it will give you some pain to leave these people, who have been so kind to you; but in the end, I am sure you will see that it is for the best. I want you to go with me to Brighton to-morrow; there we can arrange matters thoroughly. I shall not be able to come here to fetch you, so you must meet me at the London Bridge Station.” He had already got into the habit of dictating to Adrienne what she was

to do; it seemed to her so natural, so pleasant to obey him, that she never questioned his will. It was so much easier to be guided by him than to exert her own will and guide herself, especially as he led her through such pleasant ways. She would have been quite willing to give him her hand, shut her eyes and follow wherever he chose to lead her.

The next morning, according to his desire, she met him at London Bridge Station, and they started *en route* for Brighton. She had never been to that emporium of fashion, with its small gaieties, mimic grandeur, and formal follies, like, yet so unlike, its elder sister the Great Metropolis.

Charmed always with novelty of any description, Adrienne was enchanted with the fresh-looking town, with its gay shops, long lines of terraced houses, their stuccoed fronts facing the sea, ever rolling on so gloriously grand, mighty, and strong. She thought of the winds that had blown over it, of the rains that had beaten

down on its wild wet face, of the storms that had shaken it and sent thousands of brave ships and precious lives down into its cold embrace, and yet had failed to change a single feature. She thought how it was the only thing that flashes and sparkles with all its pristine glory pure and fresh as when it first came bubbling new-born from the hand of its Creator, and spreading at once over more than half the globe, covering rocky mountains and yawning caverns, that were to be peopled thereafter with such vast congregations of the living and the dead.

They strolled leisurely along the Steyne, along the Chain Pier, down on the pebbly beach, watched the white foam tossing and dancing on the tops of the breaking waves, and listened to the rushing roar of the waters, that seemed to accompany the melody within their own hearts to their unspoken words. They wandered along watching the sunset, with glowing cheeks, and tasted the salt sea spray upon their lips. Adrienne cast many a loving, dreamy look upon the wild

waves, and regretted that she must turn her head away and leave them so soon.

"There is no necessity for you to leave them," said Archibald; "indeed, I think it would be better for you to remain here altogether. Why should you return to London at all?"

"Why?" repeated Adrienne, amazed, "because I have friends there; they may be poor and, as you say, in many respects objectionable, but they are the only protectors I have, and I cannot think of leaving them without great pain. Besides, how could I stay here? You know I have not the means to live!"

"That is easily arranged," he answered; "I have told you I will see your father's executors, and, until they make some suitable provision for you, you must enter into a little mercantile concern with me; you must allow me to be your banker."

"No, no!" she exclaimed, shrinking back with a pained look, "I could not bear that. I

would rather wait till I receive my own."

"Meanwhile you will return to these poor people, partake of their scanty meal, and make their little less; living there, a stranger and intruder in their miserable home! You would rather do this than allow *me* the pleasure of obliging you, in so small a matter, and for so short a time—a few days perhaps. Think well before you decide. You shall pay me back whatever I advance, to the uttermost farthing; indeed, I will be a very usurer, and exact exorbitant interest."

As she persisted in her refusal, he seemed hurt and offended, and by degrees became cold and distant, apologizing for intruding his advice upon her, and urged his offer no more.

Adrienne was distressed; she fancied she had wounded her best friend, and blundered strangely as she attempted to excuse and explain herself. She ended by thinking herself a monster of ingratitude. She said she would return home and consult Mrs. Bennett; and if Major Dun-

das would call in the morning she would decide, and tell him if she would accept his kind offer or not. His lip curled scornfully as he answered,

“Do I understand you rightly? Consult these people on *my* affairs—make X 95 the arbiter between you and me, Adrienne? No, I decline to submit to such an ordeal. If I am to be wounded, let it be by your hand; if I am to be rejected, it must be by your tongue—their vulgar breath shall not pass between us. You wish to return to them; well, let it be so—I will not bar the way. I shall be sorry to leave you among such associates, and I hope their advice and guidance may avail you better than mine. *I* shall miss the sight of your face, the sound of your voice, for a few days, then I shall try to forget you.”

His words were so cold, they seemed to freeze Adrienne’s warm spirit; she turned pale, and trembled at the idea of parting with him, and in anger too!

“What do you mean?” she said. “You cannot take away your friendship—turn me out of your regard, because I wish to do what I think is right! It would be cruel. You have been so good and kind to me, I don’t know what I ought to do—how far it would be right for me to take advantage of your kindness. I owe you so much already—I am so deeply obliged to you.”

“We must not measure our obligations by plummet and line, Adrienne; nor arrange our feelings by the rule of three. The time has come when you must choose between them and me. I shall go no more to their house; my visits there have already exposed me to disparaging remarks. Of course this can make no difference to you; I am not so presumptuous as to suppose you will miss me.”

Adrienne’s heart overflowed; his words cut her to the soul. He seemed to think her cold, indifferent, ungrateful. Ungrateful to him! She could not bear it, and with tearful eyes

and trembling voice, tried to extricate herself from his suspicions—wild passionate words bubbled up, and broke from her lips, carrying her soul with them. She hardly knew the full force of her incoherent murmurings, until he folded her in his arms, and kissed the salt sea-spray from her lips.

CHAPTER V.

THE TEMPEST BREAKS.

“Live and let live, as I will do,
Love and let love, and so will I;
But, sweet, for me no more with you,
Not while I live, not though I die;
Good night—good-bye!”



MAJOR DUNDAS took an early opportunity of calling on the Bennetts, to relieve them of all anxiety, and at the same time inform them that Miss de Fontaine had returned to her friends. She had employed him as her messenger, he said, and trusted him with many kind regards and regrets to all, but especially to her little friend Aggie. The first time she came to London, she would call and see them; meanwhile, she had sent

Mrs. Bennett a trifling remembrance—a token of gratitude; and he placed in that worthy matron's hand a sealed envelope, containing a ten-pound note, which, to his lofty mind, was an ample recompense for all their care and kindness. He was glad to escape from that atmosphere of vulgar life, laden though it was with their overwhelming expressions of gratitude.

He paid occasional visits to Crofton, though never longer than a day's duration. At times, when they alluded, in the course of conversation, to the Manor-house, or to Adrienne, and spoke of her regretfully and wonderingly, he longed to tell them she was safe and well; but he restrained himself, feeling that if he said so much he might be led on to say more—in fact, to a breach of her confidence, and an exposure of the breach he had made in his own honour. When his presence was not officially demanded at the palace, he spent the rest of his time with Adrienne, and for awhile it passed pleasantly and serenely enough. She was in ecstasies

every day, and at everything; his continual presence, his devotion to her, undivided by other objects, was her constant source of joy. He was amused at the childish way in which she showed her passionate love, surrounding him with an atmosphere of graceful tenderness, and proving in a thousand nameless ways how all her thoughts, wishes, and hopes for the future were centred in him, and in him only: for her there was no world where he was not, beyond it was only a land of shadows.

It is strange that some men who have a strict regard for the code of honour, in their relations with the world and with each other, are most mean and dishonourable where women are concerned. They will accept the rich flowers of her life, and give her thorns in return; repay trust with treachery, truth with falsehood; take the pure gold of life, and give back a brazen counterfeit; exchange false looks, false words, perhaps false oaths, for the unstained purity of a virgin soul. They will soil

the wing of the dove, then scoff because it is no longer white. There are courts of law where men may strive with each other in an honourable or dishonourable cause, as the case may be; the dishonest trader may be punished, the dishonourable merchant shunned, for the man who breaks his faith in the mercantile world is thrown aside like a dishonoured bill; but the man who breaks the higher and holier code of morality, can be tried by no written law, he may walk free and unfettered through the social world—Conscience his only accuser, God his only judge.

Weeks rolled on, and Archibald Dundas was growing weary of contemplating Adrienne's felicity; indeed, he was gradually awakening to a full consciousness of the mistake he had made, and began to consider seriously how he could recover his lost position. Her childlike faith was a continual reproach to him; sometimes he would go out, and wander moodily along the sea-shore, reflecting and considering

what would be the wisest move to make next. He had, as he at first proposed, had an interview with the executors of the late M. de Fontaine, but they declined to move in Adrienne's affairs, unless by Madame de Fontaine's express desire. This, of course, was out of the question, as he knew Adrienne would never consent to her mother's receiving any information respecting her movements. Failing to obtain a competency for Adrienne by legitimate means, he had kept her supplied from his own resources; she receiving all as her own right.

Matters could not go on so for ever; the time was fast approaching when things must come to an end. He could not bear to think of affairs coming to any unpleasant crisis between himself and Adrienne, yet how to arrange them to their mutual satisfaction puzzled even his ingenuity. He did not want to hurt her feelings, far from that, he would do a great deal to save her from any pain. He could shake hands, kiss, and part friends with

her. Why could not she do the same with him? Time works wonders; it swells the seed, moulds the bud, opens the blossom, scatters the fading leaves upon the ground, and the flower is gone; it lays its invisible hand on all things, material or immaterial, changing and shifting the colours of life's passions, touching the bright rose tint with sombre grey, changing and training the sentiments and feelings according as the sweeping current of the outer world demands change of action. The passionate though mistaken sentiment, which had given a sudden impetus to Archibald's life, had passed utterly away, and the reaction had crept over him in a sense of utter weariness. He must speak to Adrienne, and tell her that this foolish pastime of love-making and castle-building must have an end. He would then open a fresh page in the book of life, unblurred, unblotted by scrawls of passionate follies and vain regrets; he would shut up the story of the past, and clasp it fast. Why could not she do

the same? Why should she remember, when he was anxious to forget? The course that would be most prudent for her to adopt was plain enough. She must humble herself, and return to the Manor-house. He would return to the world, and begin a new life—a new career with Lena Carlton. It was all very easy for him to talk, and argue thus with himself, as he wandered along by the sea-shore; but when he stood before Adrienne's face, so loving and trustful, his courage faltered; he was afraid—he dared not strike the blow that he knew would crush out all the sap and verdure from her life, and leave it like a broken, barren tree. Then he grew angry with her, with himself, and with all the world. With the mean cowardice of the ancient Adam (which, through the mist of ages, still looks contemptible), he blamed her for tempting him, and not himself for sinning. If anything went wrong with him, he never thought of blaming himself; he laid the fault on the world gene-

rally, and his own special follies he attributed to the weakness of poor human nature. He had never before been placed under such peculiar circumstances, and he therefore pitied himself the more; he thought there never was a man so ill-used by adverse fate as himself. His spirit rebelled against Adrienne's persistent constancy.

"She ought to see I am perplexed," he argued, "and lend me a helping hand to cut this Gordian knot that tethers me with difficulties. If she would but be sensible and agreeable, there would be no difficulties in the matter." He knew, however, that she would not regard the affair in the same light as himself.

Considering all the circumstances as he looked at them, it is not surprising that his visits to Brighton became less frequent, and his absences of longer duration; indeed, when he was there he was in a state of feverish irritation, and longed to be away. Adrienne chafed

sorely at the changed aspect of affairs. She seemed unconsciously to feel that the perfume of the rose was dying, and the thorns began to wound her.

Major Dundas had been away from Brighton more than a week ; during that time Adrienne had been more than usually *triste* and lonely ; she had been cogitating on many matters more gravely than she was accustomed to think. He came down one evening, looking more than commonly fatigued and gloomy ; by this time she had learned to understand his different moods, and knew that he did not like to be asked questions, or to have observations made upon him or upon his appearance ; so she talked and prattled away at random, telling him of her little cares and adventures, which were as harmless as the wanderings of a wild bird. Once or twice he smiled absently, then frowned, as though to scare away some troublesome thought.

After dinner he seated himself at the win-

dow, lighted his cigar, and gazed out moodily upon the sea; she took a stool, and seated herself by his side. There were a few moments of unbroken silence; strangely enough, they were both thinking of one subject, though viewing it in different phases. She was the first to speak.

"May I talk to you a little, Archibald?" she said; he had never allowed her to contract his name, and call him Archie.

"Of course," he answered; "I never knew that a woman wanted a license for talking."

"Don't say anything rude about women, if you please, sir, or I shall stand up as counsel for the defence."

"But you know you always do the best part of the talking, Adrienne."

"And often the best part of the acting too. But I am not going to be driven from my point; I want to speak to you seriously."

"I am quite ready to listen," he answered, laying down his cigar for a moment, and pre-

paring for the tug of war. "I have been thinking very seriously myself, and I have come to the conclusion that we stand in a very narrow strait, and the sooner we get out of it the better."

"That is exactly what I think," said Adrienne. "You know we cannot live here for ever."

"That is very certain," he replied. "I was going to make the same observation to you." He blew a cloud of smoke slowly from his lips as he spoke.

Adrienne answered, with a shy, nervous look,

"Don't you think we had better be married as soon as possible? I have particular reasons for wishing it; then we could leave Brighton, and go down to Crofton, or anywhere you like; it is not pleasant, and it is not right, to live like this any longer than we are obliged." Her breath came thick and fast as she added: "I should not fear to face my mother with you by my side; she will have no power over me,

and will not dare to touch me when I am once your wife."

She twined her soft hand lovingly in his, and looked up proudly in his face. There was a flickering light in his eyes as he answered,

"Dear Adrienne, your imagination, as usual, is carrying you beyond the realms of reality. I dare say it would be a very pleasant romance for us to go down to Crofton in the most approved style—the church bells ringing a merry peal, fair flowers strewn at our feet, and your stately mother at the Manor-house gates, ready to receive us with open arms; but, unfortunately, that course of action is simply impossible."

"Of course it is, about the flowers and all that; but—I dare say you will think me very changeable," she added, nervously; "but, seriously, I should like to see my mother, and my dear sister, darling Mathilde, again."

"I am delighted to hear you say so!" he exclaimed, for he fancied he saw a way through

his difficulties; "I have always thought it a pity you should allow your impulsive nature to run so utterly away with your judgment; domestic quarrels are always bad, especially between mother and child; the sooner they are made up the better. Let by-gones be by-gones."

"Yes," she answered; "I never thought the day would come when I should wish to see my mother's face again; but I dare say we were both wrong. I shall be very glad to set things right between us, especially now, when I am, or shall be so happy—perhaps she will like me better when I bring a fresh source of pride and honour to her home, for I am so proud of you! I shall be so glad for her to see the prize I have won!"

"My poor Adrienne!" he said, and there was a coaxing accent in his voice, "I am sorry to throw your prettily-arranged drama off the stage—it all sounds very well in the programme, but one important part must be left out in the

play—there must be no Hamlet; or some other actor must fill it. I cannot be exhibited as a matrimonial prize—so far as I am concerned, you have drawn a blank.”

A cold, white mist seemed to fall before her face as Archibald Dundas spoke those words; in a faint voice, that could not be controlled, she said,

“A blank!—what can you mean?”

“My meaning is very simple—I have been to-day to choose Miss Carlton’s wedding-dress.”

“Well, still I do not understand,” said Adrienne, with a dazed look; “what has Miss Carlton’s wedding-dress to do with you or me?”

“To you it is perhaps nothing—to me it is everything. This is mere folly, Adrienne—you profess to be ignorant, when you must have known all along of my engagement to Lena Carlton.”

He jerked the end of his cigar out of the window, and turned round to face the battle-

field boldly, for he expected a vigorous attack of reproaches, a storm of tears, and had prepared himself to join issue upon every count in the pleadings. He was mistaken—there was no indication of a storm, no signs of tears. She had risen and stood silent before him, staring with wide, open eyes, glassy and dulled, as though all expression had died out of them—she neither moved nor spoke; so statuesque and still she stood, she might have been changed by some necromancer's art into marble; and, after all, is there not a magic power in a look? Archibald Dundas returned her stony gaze with a look of disquietude; he felt that this dead calm was more terrible and portentous than the storm he had dreaded.

“Why do you not speak, Adrienne?” he said, growing more and more alarmed. “Why do you seem so horribly scared?—you cannot be so much surprised as you pretend. You must have known of my engagement all along.”

Her spirit seemed to be wandering in search

of something that was evident, and yet not quite palpable to her senses. She grasped it now—his words lifted aside the veil and showed her the naked truth. An almost imperceptible shudder seemed to creep over her—a wild cry, such as a dumb animal might give when hurt to the death, broke from her lips, she lifted her arms with a gesture of mute despair, and fell crushed and helpless to the ground.

“Adrienne! come, dear Adrienne!” he exclaimed, bending over her, startled and anxious, “rouse yourself—look up—forget what I have said—all shall be as you will!”

His voice, and all his endearing words, failed to rouse her now. Raising her up, he carried her to her room, and left her in charge of the people of the house. Scarcely knowing what to do, he rushed from the house, down to the beach, to cool his burning brow. He thought that it would be better to leave her alone for awhile, to think over matters, and

reconcile herself to what was inevitable. After a few hours' absence he returned, and was alarmed to hear she had not yet recovered consciousness. The first physician in Brighton was immediately sent for. He looked grave and thoughtful; having administered the usual restoratives to her, he said,

"Poor child! she has received some severe mental blow, I fear beyond my help—she is very young——"

"She is; but, doctor, it is a mere fainting-fit—surely she will recover?"

"She may, or she may not," he answered; "I cannot say—I have done all that is necessary at present—I will see her early in the morning."

Awestruck and sick at heart, Archibald crept back to her chamber. A sad, pitiful sight it was. She lay there, so wan, so white, so utterly forlorn. There was a mute eloquence in her sorrow, that touched his inmost heart more, much more, than the strongest

and most telling words could have done. He had seen the dead and the dying in every stage of suffering, and had heard their last groans—witnessed, unmoved, their writhings and contortions; but he had never beheld such a solemn, pitiful, unnerving sight as that now before him. He could not bear it. He left her, and leaned out of the window, looking over the sea, letting the rain-drops fall upon his forehead, and the wind wander through his thick, soft curls. He became more and more feverish and oppressed. Cold and imperturbable as he usually was, he felt his heart swelling and distracted now.

He sat there until it was past midnight; the rain had ceased, and the stars had come out one by one, till they studded the skies all over. The storm which had been raging within his breast ceased, and a dead calm ensued. He closed his eyes, and fell into a dreamy, abstracted state; suddenly he felt his hand clasped with a cold clammy touch that made him shiver. He

started up, and his eye rested on Adrienne, looking like one just risen from the dead.

"My dear Adrienne," he said with unfeigned delight, "I am so glad you are better. Come, sit down by me, my poor child; you have given me a terrible fright."

"I have been ill, then, have I?" she said, passing her hand wearily over her forehead; "I don't know—I am not quite sure of myself. It seems as though something strange has happened to me; but it must have been a dream. Let me look in your face, Archibald, and I shall see at once if it was a dream or not."

He held her hand fast, and looked straight into her eyes, but he spoke not a word.

"It is true!" Her voice rang now with an expression of acute agony. "O God! it was no dream—it was too true!"

Archibald gave a sigh of complete relief; he was glad to see her tears; anything rather than that terrible dead calm which had so unmanned him.

“My dear Adrienne,” he said gently, “pray do not give way to such foolish sentimentality. It can do no good. Think the matter over calmly, and you will see that I am right. There is no reason why we should not continue to be friends without being so closely allied as we are at present. Your proposal to return home to the Manor-house is perfectly wise, and has relieved me of a great anxiety. It is the most correct and best thing you can do. You must return to Crofton at once.”

“As your wife—never, never alone!” she moaned.

“That is impossible; you ought to have known all along that such could never be. You must have heard that I have been long engaged to Lena Carlton.”

“I never knew—I never could have conceived such a thing!” exclaimed Adrienne. “How was it possible I could believe that you were engaged to her, when you seemed to care so much for me?”

"And I *do* care for you, a very great deal," he said.

"Then why do you wish to leave me?"

"We must all bow to circumstances. I cannot break my word to Lena."

"Why should you break your word to me?" Her lip quivered with wounded feelings as she spoke; but there was no outburst of indignation—no presage of a storm.

"My word!" he echoed; "think again. Adrienne, when did I pledge my word to you? Remember

'Liking light as ours, love, was never meant to last,
It was a brief delusion, and as such it has passed.'

Why not let it go?"

Adrienne was silent for a moment, and turned away her head. What a world of thought swept over her during that short space of time! Her hurt soul uncovered itself, and showed its wounds when she spoke again.

"Oh! Archibald," she exclaimed, "I never

thought things would come to this between us—that we should quibble about the words that seemed so much, and meant so little. I believed you loved me, for I read your actions, not your words.”

“Misread—misunderstood.”

His calm, cold tones seemed to press back Adrienne’s tears. She was amazed and bewildered; everything seemed to be shifting and changing, and coming out in a new light. She had not the courage to look her position calmly in the face; presently a gleam of living light, kindled perhaps by despair, came back into her eyes. She caught at a fragile hope, as a drowning man catches at a straw.

“Lena Carlton cannot need you as I do. She has parents, sister, friends—is beloved and happy. *I* have nothing in the world but *you*. I will go down to Crofton and tell her everything, and beg and pray of her to release you from your word!”

Archibald’s face grew dark. A spark of fire

flashed from his steel-blue eye. He caught Adrienne by the wrist, exclaiming,

“What is that you say? You will go down to Crofton, and carry this scandal to Lena’s ears! Is that a threat?” He paused for her reply, but his anger took her by surprise, and kept her silent. He flung her hand away, adding, “Pooh! you are not so bold. You dare not do it. What has she done to you, that you should wish to injure her?”

“What have I done that you should injure me?” retorted Adrienne.

“Oh! if you are determined to consider yourself in the light of an injured victim, you can, of course, make out a perfect case. I admit we have both been foolish, both very much to blame,” he said, with unusual magnanimity.

“You are generous to admit so much as that,” said Adrienne, scorn slightly curling her lip.

“It would be better for us both to let by-gones be by-gones,” he continued. “I am

anxious to arrange matters pleasantly and quietly, and I must say I think it both selfish and ungenerous of you to make this stir; for, after all, we must part, and it is much better that we should part friends."

"Friends!" she answered. "No, we can never be friends again—never—but I will not reproach you, I will not appeal to you; for I know now I might as well beat my heart against a stone, and hope to make an impression—you are as cold and as cruel as steel."

"Well, if it be so, am I to blame? But you are welcome to abuse me, especially if it affords you comfort. I dare say it is a sort of safety-valve, and relieves your feelings. You ought to know that I could not make this communication to you without great pain. Circumstances have rendered it necessary that I should speak to you, and you know I never shrink from my duty, however disagreeable it may be. If you had had any delicate feeling, you would have spared me much of this annoyance; but as it is, I

have only to bear and forbear. There are many necessary arrangements to be made, and when you are reasonable, I shall be glad to take your instructions upon the matter."

Adrienne did not seem to hear him, she was pacing up and down the room, oppressed with a grief too profound for words.

"Cruel!—cruel! What shall I do? What can I do?" she moaned, with white, trembling lips.

"It is no use exciting yourself like this," said Archibald. "Let me advise you——"

"No," she exclaimed, "I will take no more of your advice; it would have been better for me if I had never seen, had never listened to you."

"So much for gratitude," he said, angrily. "That is all the thanks I get for all my trouble and anxiety. I wish I had passed by, and left you as I found you!"

"I would to God you had!" she exclaimed, with passionate grief. "It would have been

better for me if you had left me in the cold dark streets to beg, or die, than leave me to live now! Oh! why did you love me at all, if it was to come to such an end as this?"

"We had better not go into such questions," he answered, "it can do no possible good to either of us. You ought to have known things could not go on so for ever."

"Yes, yes," she sighed, with a weary, broken spirit, "I ought to have known—yes, I ought to have known—and you, in your worldly wisdom, ought to have had pity on me. I was so wretched, so lost, so lonely, and your kind words, your sympathy, were so sweet to me. I never thought they could have such a bitter end. I do not believe it—I cannot realize it yet."

Archibald tried to argue with her, and make her see things in a reasonable light, as he called it. But she was blind, she could look at nothing, think of nothing, but her utter desolation. No stormy anger, no bitter reproaches, broke from her lips. It seemed as though a huge black

shadow had fallen over her, shut out the light, and darkened her senses. Humbled and spirit-broken though she was, she was proud withal, and pride kept her from falling at his feet, and pleading for her good name's sake, more than she would have pleaded for her life.

Early in the morning Major Dundas left Brighton, promising to return in a day or two to settle affairs there ; advising Adrienne to make up her mind to return to the Manor-house, and promising to escort her down at her convenience. She smiled a bitter, scornful smile, and answered nothing.

Poor child ! poor Adrienne ! she was alone once more, worse, more than ever alone, with the wide world before her, and no experience to guide, no kind friend to direct her. If she fell by the wayside, there was no good Samaritan to help her to rise, and to bind up her wounds. She was alone, quite alone—a waif, a wreck upon the ocean of life. Unhappily her mind was not well balanced ; the


proper ingredients were wanting that make a virtuous and reasonable being. She had not been schooled to bear evil and injustice, to be sanctified by sorrow, and to look forward hopefully to the end. Her life had been writ all awry, in odd scraps and fragments, blurred with folly, blotted with tears. Her lessons had never been taught with tenderness and love; all her experience, all she knew, had been beaten into her with stripes and bruises—not of the flesh, but of the spirit. She had wandered through all the years that were gone in darkness, stumbling along, stretching out her hands, lifting her heart in search of sympathy, but found it not. She cried for bread, and fate gave her a stone.

CHAPTER VI.

A WASTED LIFE.

"Time was I did not shame thee, and time was
 I thought to live and make thee honourable
 With deeds as great as these men's, but they live,
 These, and I die ; and what thing should have been,
 Surely I know not ; yet I charge thee, seeing
 I am dead already, love me not the less,

 Love me not less, thy first-born, though grief come,
 Grief only, of me, and of all these great joy."


 T wanted exactly one week to Lena's
 wedding-day. Archibald was staying
 at the Rectory, and all went merrily as things
 should go at such a season. Time seemed to
 be marching on with a steady musical tramp,
 leading them into a future that was rich in

love, abounding in promises, and coloured by the brightest tints of hope and faith.

Archie and Lena spent a great deal of their time together; they seemed to have so much to talk about; so many matters to arrange, that all the family, as though by some tacit agreement, fell away from them, and left them as much as possible to themselves; they were, no doubt, charming companions to each other, but they added no brilliancy to the family circle.

The morning had been dull and dreary; but towards the evening the clouds drifted from the western sky; they had more or less obscured the sun all day, covering its face with a wet veil; now they were rapidly disappearing, and the world could gaze upon its broadened disk, sinking in all its glory, from its throne of crimson and gold, into its nightly rest. Archie and Lena went out into the garden—not among the flowers, for they were wet and hazy with rain-drops, and they

could not take their favourite ramble through the shrubbery, for the drops still pattered from the branches, and dripped from the laden leaves. They had no choice but to take the broad gravel pathway which skirted the lawn, that gave them, in clear weather, a wide, extensive view of the surrounding country. There they paced up and down, arranging and rearranging all kinds of imaginary affairs. Lena felt proud and happy, and as she looked up in Archibald's fine fair face, with its chiselled features and lordly aristocratic look, she thought that no prince, in fame or fairy tale, had ever equalled him; no poet had ever conceived a hero so chivalric, so noble, and so true; every star of fiction paled before his living glory.

Suddenly she stopped in the middle of the path, and exclaimed,

“Look there! who's that coming up the lane, Archie?”

As she spoke she gazed earnestly down the

lane, shading her eyes from the dazzling glare of the setting sun. His heart turned sick, he cast his eyes away, he could not look in the direction she indicated; he was afraid. It was a new sensation in him to feel fear, either morally or physically, for he was as bold and brave as a lion. He had faced danger and death in their most terrible and varied forms; yet his cheek had never blenched nor his spirit quailed; but now he was haunted, by night and by day, with Adrienne's wan white face; he could not get rid of it, for, even in his dreams, it came between him and his fair night's rest. He persuaded himself that he had done his duty, in endeavouring to persuade her to try and retrieve the one false step they had taken; if she was resolved to feel injured, to fancy herself a victim, and turn a deaf ear to reason and common sense, he could not help it. He had done his best to forget her, to wash her away from his memory, and send her drifting

with the tide of life, down into the past, where he had buried many other "light things and slight;" but she would not be forgotten, she would not pass from his memory. Something stronger than his own strong will kept her there, and left her face graven in the air, before him, wherever he went, and even laid it on his pillow at night.

He could not look round when Lena exclaimed,

"Who's that coming up the lane?" For he fancied he might see Adrienne, weary and travel-stained, toiling along, with the real white living face, to stand between him and his bride that was to be. He clutched Lena's hand, and held it fast. She did not notice his agitation; her attention was absorbed in watching and wondering who were the newcomers, that came creeping so slowly along the road. As they came nearer and nearer, she recognised them, and said excitedly,

"Why, Archie, it is old Kitty Davis; and I

do believe that figure hobbling along by her side is her son Joe!"

Without speaking another word, or waiting to hear his answer or remark, she bounded down to the garden gate; in a moment had thrown it open, and was shaking hands with the old woman, showering kind welcoming words and pleasant smiles upon the broken-down soldier. Archibald stood for a moment where she had left him, in lofty surprise, looking on at the proceedings, and slightly disgusted at what he considered her unseemly familiarity. He sauntered slowly towards her, whistling as he went; he nodded carelessly at old Kitty, and addressed her son, saying,

"So you have come back again, Joe!—like the rest of us, you have been reaping the field of glory."

"No," replied Kitty, dropping him a profound curtsy, "beggin' your honour's pardon, he ain't like you at all. You've got all the glory, he've got all the wounds, poor boy!"

"He's proud of them, are you not, Joe?" said Archibald. "What can a man do better than be wounded in the service of his country?—except die for it! You need not look so indignant, Kitty, we cannot always fairly divide honours, not even the bleeding honours of the battlefield; your son seems to have got more than his share; well, I don't grumble—I may be the favourite of fortune next time." Kitty had an idea that something like a jest sounded in his words.

"Ah, Capt'n," she said, "you was always fond of a joke; I do believe if you was a-dyin' you'd joke with your doctor, and even if you was buried you'd have the last word wi' the grave-digger."

"No light jest would pass there, it must be a grave subject at least," he answered. Joe, who was generally slow of speech, and had been collecting his thoughts, and staring admiringly at Archibald during this brief colloquy, here broke in, answering Major Dundas's first address to him—

"We don't mind bein' wounded, and hundreds

on us 'ud rather have our lives trod out than see our Capt'ns knocked over; 'specially when they was as brave and free as you, Capt'n Archiball."

"I admire your sentiments, Joe, they are a credit to the army," replied Archibald.

"Bless you, sir, we heerd all about you; and mighty proud I was to tell our fellows as we both belonged to the same place, and how we used to go a-birds-nesting together, and you was allus so bold as to climb to the top o' the trees, where you'd the biggest chance o' breakin' your neck."

"I am afraid you embellished the story, Joe," said Lena. Joe only grinned, and added,

"Once I seen you ridin' by, Capt'n Archiball, and I stood right afore you, in hopes you'd know me, but you didn't. It 'ud ha' done my heart good to ha' spoke to some 'un as knowed me, all them thousand miles from home. Perhaps you mightn't ha' been too proud to shake hands wi' me there."

"No, nor here either," exclaimed Archie, with a sudden impulse of good-nature, stretching out his hand. Joe made no answering movement, by the working of his face he seemed struck by some acute emotion.

"Bless you, sir, he've lost both his arms," replied Kitty, lifting aside his cloak, and showing his empty sleeves.

"Perhaps you wouldn't mind making-believe, sir, and shakin' me here, the nearest pint where my hands ought to be," and poor Joe jerked his head towards his shoulder. Archie laid his hand kindly and tenderly upon him, evidently touched by Joe's sad plight.

"You have been very unfortunate, my poor fellow," he said; "but cheer up, I am sure you have done well and bravely; I will take up your case. We must see what the country will do to make up for the hands she has taken away."

"I hope you are going in to see papa, Joe," exclaimed Lena; "he will be so glad to see you,

and we will all do our best to make you welcome home."

"I wish we was agoin' to take him better news," exclaimed Kitty, sorrowfully, as they passed on. Lena thought she was alluding to her son, and paid no attention to her words.

"You heerd what the Capt'n said, mother," exclaimed Joe, cheerfully, as soon as they were out of hearing. "I allus knew he'd a good heart, and in the right place too."

Major Dundas looked at most things from his own peculiar point of view. - He was greatly shocked at Joe's misfortunes, and, as he and Lena watched the pair with sympathising eyes, he said,

"Well, Lena, that's what I call a wilful act of mercy; that poor devil had better have been shot right off than come back like that, a mere living remnant of a man."

"Ah, Archie," she answered, "we cannot judge; see how his mother loves him; he does seem a wretched object to us; but, maimed

and wounded as he is, he is a comfort and a blessing to her; depend upon it, she would rather work for him, beg for him, ay, or even die for him, than he should have died out there and left his bones in a foreign land."

"Well, I dare say you are right," he answered; "there is no accounting for the freaks of human nature, and women, especially mothers, are such sentimental creatures."

Meanwhile, Kitty and her son had reached the house, and were shown at once into the Rector's study;—for his doors were never closed against his poor parishioners—he was always ready to hear and sympathise with them in their little trials. He had been a patient listener and comforting confidante to poor old Kitty through all her anxieties respecting her son, and it was with unfeigned pleasure he greeted the wanderer's return. Although he was greatly grieved to see he had come home in such a helpless condition, he sympathized with him in a healthy, cheering way, telling him he would

be quite a hero among his young companions, who had stayed idly at home, while he was fighting far away, and gaining such honourable wounds.

“You must not expect to lead an idle life, though, Joe,” he said. “I shall hope to find you the swiftest, as I am sure you will be the trustiest, messenger in the village; and you must come up often to the Rectory, Joe,” he added, cordially; “you will always be welcome, and you must give us the benefit of your gatherings from the war. I dare say you have some stories that will bring us tears as well as laughter.”

“Right you are there, sir,” replied Joe, shifting from one leg to the other, and looking very much troubled. “I got a power o’ bad news, and sorry enough I am to bring it; but mother and me thought we’d better get it over at once.”

He looked at his mother, as though to implore her to help him out with his story; but

she only sighed, shook her head, and fixed her eyes upon the ground.

“It’s about Master Laurence, sir—him and me got to be good friends out there.”

“My son Laurence out there in Russia, Joe!—you’ve brought me news of my boy?” exclaimed the Rector, leaning anxiously forward, and looking earnestly on Joe’s downcast face. He saw in a moment the news was not good; his heart recognised part, but not the whole truth. His face contracted with an expression of acute agony; he fancied his son—his bright-eyed, lithe-limbed boy, his only son, had come back to him a maimed and mangled trunk, like this before him. No matter, a thrill of joy mingled with the pulse of pain. His heart sickened, and his voice quivered, as he said,

“Speak out, my man—don’t be afraid; I am quite prepared. I see, he has come back hurt—disfigured, perhaps—and he has sent you in to tell me that I should not be taken by surprise. Well, God bless him, he is welcome!”

At that moment he fancied he saw a shadow pass by the window. "Ah!" he exclaimed, rushing forward, "he is there! Laurie, my boy, come in!—come home!"

"No, he ain't there, and he never will come home—never no more—never no more!" blubbered poor Joe.

The Rector reeled back as though he had been shot.

"He is dead—dead—dead!" he moaned, and covered his face with his hands.

He grasped the truth now, and held it fast, living, or seeming to live, a life in the next few minutes. His son's career, from his bright promising boyhood, his wilful youth, and the follies of his later years, when he had gone stumbling along, tripping at every step, all the events of his ill-starred life flashed before the father's eyes, and lay heavy at his heart. Every angry word, every passionate reproach and stormy scene that had passed between them, flashed up in his memory with a cruel

force, overwhelming him with bitter thoughts, stinging with vain regrets. All their lives they had been divided, everything had gone wrong between them; they had been groping in the dark; neither could find the way to the other's heart; misunderstandings had arisen, doubts and mistrusts had followed in their footsteps; they had been playing at cross-purposes through a long lapse of years, now the game was over—all was at an end. There was no going back—no going forward. As things had been, so they must remain, now and for evermore. There could be no explanations, no forgiveness; it was too late—too late! Then swift to the father's brain came the memory of their last meeting, on that bright summer day, in the meadows. The cloud that overshadowed them then seemed to dissolve now, and drench his heart with bitter, unshed tears.

“My boy—my poor boy!” he moaned, inwardly, “if I had trusted you then, this would never have been! Dead!—dead!—and I, his

father, drove him away ; but for me, he might have stood before me now, alive and well ! Oh ! if he could come back, even for an hour, that I might tell him my heart yearned over him through all his waywardness ! How I always loved him, he never knew—he can never know it now. I shall never embrace him living, nor behold him dead ! He is lying out there, in a foreign land, cold and stark. He had no friend by to close his eyes, or gather up his unburied bones.”

This was the stream of thought that rushed through the Rector’s brain, and shook his very soul with passionate grief ; but he gave no outward sign of the storm within. He covered his face, and sat motionless. Joe, too, with a profound respect for the Rector’s grief, was silent for some moments ; then he continued, sorrowfully,

“ I promised, if I ever lived to come home, I’d tell you all about it. He was killed a-savin’ of me, sir ; savin’ me he was killed, and I

weren't worth it. A poor cripple like me to come home, and a fine brave-lookin' gen'leman like him to be layin' there dead. I weren't worth it. It's me that ought to ha' been killed."

"Don't say that, Joe. God knows best," whispered Kitty, and in her heart she blessed God that he had come home, crippled and helpless though he was. The Rector uncovered his face, and said, in a broken voice,

"Tell me all, Joe—I must bear it. I see—I see—he enlisted. I never knew it. For months I have been waiting for news of him. It has come at last. Give it me. I cannot ask questions. Go on, Joe."

Mr. Carlton leaned his head upon his hands, prepared to listen; he could not speak much, he was too overcome, and was afraid he should break down utterly if he attempted many words.

"Yes, sir," continued Joe, in obedience to his command. "Master Laurence 'listed, and was drafted into our ridgment when he got out there, and though he was a real gen'leman,

there weren't no pride about him; he did his duty cheerful, and was allus ready to do a good turn to anybody. He was very good to me, sir, and he'd set along o' me o' nights, and talk about you and home, and look at the stars, and say as perhaps you was a-lookin' at 'em too, and how proud you'd be if he came home a General—and so he would, if he'd lived."

The Rector's heart beat quick. So Laurence had thought of him, and talked of him! He was greedy to hear more; he listened eagerly, saying,

"Go on, Joe, tell me everything—how it happened at last. He was killed in action?"

"Yes, in a good and noble action—he saved my boy!" exclaimed Kitty, and the tears crept down her furrowed cheeks.

"I'll tell you how it was, sir. We'd had an awful day, fightin' hard, and shot and shell flyin' about like a storm from hell. Them as was left on us was a-hurryin' back to the trenches. I was down, badly hurt, I couldn't

move; hundreds had trampled over me, and gone on to save themselves—no blame to 'em either, life is sweet. Then Master Laurence come along, and he see me and stopped. He stooped down and gi' me some brandy out o' his pouch. 'Why, Joe, old fellow,' he says, 'this'll never do—cheer up, I'll help you along.' But I couldn't cheer up, I couldn't move, anyways I thought I must die, so I told him to go on and leave me. He wouldn't. 'Not a bit on it, Joe,' he said, 'I'll never desert a comrade in distress.' Wi' that—he was mighty strong, sir—he took me up on his back, as though I wur a child, and hurried along, chaffin' the bullets as was whistling round us. One on 'em struck him at last, and we both rolled over; he never spoke a word, nor he never let go o' me—I thought it wur a death grip, but it weren't. He picked hisself up agin, and crawled along on his hands and knees, till we was safe inside the trench—then he let go. 'It's all up with me, Joe,' he said, faint-like; 'but I hope

you'll get all right. You've got your old mother at home, but nobody 'll miss me.'"

"He thought that! he believed that!" the Rector groaned aloud.

Poor Joe's grateful heart overflowed at the remembrance of his dead friend, and the tears he could not repress rolled down his cheeks. Then the utter helplessness of his broken manhood was pitiable to behold—he had no power even to wipe away his own tears. With touching tenderness his mother took out her handkerchief, and dried them gently and lovingly, as though he had still been a child upon her knee. Henceforth one pair of hands must serve them both. Age must minister to youth. Joe might regain his health, and live to be a strong man, but his strength could be of no avail—to the end of his days he must remain helpless, dependent as a child. Yet, dis-branched, dismembered as he was, poor, feeble old Kitty was a proud and happy mother; that stricken trunk was all the world to her—it was

hers, it was her only son. As soon as they had each sufficiently mastered their emotion, Joe continued—

“We was dragged inside, sir; and as soon as the doctor seen him, he said he couldn’t live more than an hour or so. There wasn’t a dry eye in the tent when they heerd that, for all our chaps loved him, he’d such free, careless ways. They wanted to drag me away, for one arm was shattered, and they wanted it off at once; but he catched hold on me and begged so hard as I was left ’longside o’ him, ‘Let me look at you till the last, Joe,’ he said; ‘you’re like a bit of home to me. You’ll live and carry my last look and my last words back to my father. I’ve—I’ve been a sad scapegrace, but I think he’ll grieve a little—not much, I hope, my poor father—God bless him! You’ll tell him I grieve for all the pain I’ve give him, Joe; if I’d lived I might have squared the account.’ Them wur his werry words, sir; when I was in the ’orspital I used to say ’em over,

over and over, fear I'd forget 'em, for I thought you'd like to hear 'em same as he said 'em. He wur in awful pain, sir; but he tried to cheer up, and 'pologised for groanin'. He asked some'un to gi' him his pocket-book, and he wrote in it, and asked me to bring it home to you."

The Rector looked up, and stretched out his hand eagerly, but never spoke a word—he could not.

"The doctor sealed it up, and took care on it while I was bad; when I left the 'orspital he give it me back. Mother, it's here, in this pocket."

With trembling hands the old woman searched among her son's rags, and, carefully fastened among them, she found a packet containing poor Laurie's tobacco-pouch and pocket-book wrapped up together; these she placed in the Rector's hand. With nervous haste he tore it open, and hurriedly turned over the pages, until he came to that which was too evidently

scrawled by a hand shaken by death-tremors. It was written awry (as all his life had been), crooked, and some words were almost illegible, but they made themselves clear to the father's eye, and reached his heart.

"I have not long to live, dear father," wrote Laurie; "my life is running away fast, but I feel it will not be gone until I have said my last good-night to you. Joe will tell you how this has all come about—my heart is full—but I have no time—I must write briefly of my sorrow and my love of you—of home. I could go this dark journey better, if I could have seen your face once more, carried your forgiveness with me, but I know it will follow me to the grave. I know I have been a thriftless son; I can see things clearer now—and perhaps if I had lived—but God knows best! There are some words I should like to have spoken with my living lips, instead of sending them from my dead heart—our last meeting, father, you remember

that? I can see you now, and I know the suspicion that threw a cloud between us—but it was false! I cannot write; ask your wife—I absolve her from her promise—*she* will make all clear and plain. Forgive me for all pain, all sorrow I have caused you, and believe I have always loved, even when I grieved you most. My last thought, so long as I have power to think, shall be of you. I fancy I can see you now, reading these my last words, and thinking of poor Laurie in his narrow grave so far away—I can see you now, in our own pleasant home, sisters and all, and I am here dying—dying! I don't mind—I don't think I am sorry." Here the poor hand had become so palsied, the thought so confused, the words so scrawled, that the Rector's eye could scarcely trace their meaning. Something he caught of "kindness" and "good comrade;" the last ill-written but still legible words were, "Take care of poor Joe."

The Rector sobbed aloud; the paper was

soon wet with his blinding tears—strangely solemn and grateful were poor Laurie's last words to him. It was not the old reckless, hare-brained Laurie who was speaking to him now, but a dead man calling from the grave; and the voice came to him with a solemn, all-convincing power. He had at last caught a glimpse of his son's better nature. The grave, which levels all things, had levelled the mountain of mistrust that had stood between them in their lives. Death had taught him a lesson he would never have learned. If Laurence had lived ever so long a life, there would always have hung a cloud over them—a mist before their eyes. Now it was all clear where all had been darkness. Laurence had referred him to his wife—what could that mean? Whatever the story she might have to tell, he would never ask to hear it. He believed his son's dying words, and would have no explanation. A quiet satisfied feeling mingled now with his strong grief; the pain of

their last meeting, which had caused him so much regret, was becoming rapidly soothed. He felt as though their souls had met at last; even on the brink of the grave, so many miles asunder, with death before, and darkness and pain around them, they had seen the light. Kitty and her son were both deeply affected, and let Mr. Carlton's grief have its full vent. Then she spoke; poor soul, she could find no words of her own to comfort, so she searched where they are always to be found.

"The Lord giveth—the Lord taketh away—blessed be the name of the Lord!" It was the very text he had taken for the last funeral sermon he had preached; he had spoken wisely and consolingly to others, now he must take comfort to himself.

"You are right, Kitty," he said; "if God strikes, it must be right and well for us; but still we are but human, and cannot help feeling the blow. He was my only son. You

know what that means. Have you anything more to tell me, Joe, of my poor boy? I should like to hear everything, to the very last."

"It wur soon over, sir ; but he kept moving his fingers and his lips, and babbling about things as we could make no sense on; we thought he was delerous, but I don't know, nor I don't remember nothin' more he said. He didn't live much more nor an hour, and went off quite peaceful at last."

"I will never forget you, Joe—never, as long as I live," said the Rector, gratefully. "I thank God that my boy had such a friend as you!"

Joe looked rather sheepish and uncomfortable—a sort of guilty look came into his face, and he whispered to his mother,

"Take out t'other thing—I shall feel like a thief if I keep it, wi'out his knowin' I got it."

Kitty dived again into his pocket, and brought out a bullet, about half an inch in diameter.

“There it is, sir, the doctor give it to me, because I bore the operation so quiet. A kind of reward it was, sir, and I should like to feel it was a kind o’ keepsake, if you’ve got no objection.”

“What is it, Joe?” inquired the Rector.

“It was took out of his side, sir, and it was that what knocked him over.”

“The bullet that killed my son!” said the Rector, shuddering; “take it away, Joe, take it away! I would as soon touch the hand that murdered him!”

Amazed at Mr. Carlton’s generosity, Joe was re-possessed of his treasure, and he and his mother left the house together.

Poor Laurie’s pocket-book contained some other loose papers besides the letter addressed to his father. On one was a sketch of Adrienne de Fontaine’s face—very like her, but idealized and beautified by the loving labour he had bestowed upon it. Her name, in quaintly designed, fanciful letters, surrounded it. His


one sweet, mysterious secret (that for a brief space of time had filled his life with all the romance and poetry he had ever known) seemed to creep out of the grave, to reveal itself to wondering eyes. There was also a fragmentary letter, which he had commenced, and never finished, addressed to his sister Lena—it was evidently written by fits and starts, in his old rambling way; it seemed as though he had longed to have some communication with home, and to open his heart to her, but had not the courage to do it. In one part he said, “I should like to hear some news of the Manor-house—of your friend Adrienne, I mean—if I had only—but, there, it is no use to talk of what might have been—I feel now as though I was doing wrong even to write her name; I wish you would speak to her sometimes of me—not of my follies—God knows how I hate them now, for they seem to stand up and thrust me farther and farther away from *her*. Ah! Lena, you would think

your wild brother was mad indeed, if you knew how much he thought of her—God bless her, wherever she is, wherever she goes!” He had written the letter from day to day, in the style of a journal; but Adrienne was the key-note of every word he uttered. This paper the Rector put reverently aside. If Adrienne ever returned, as they hoped and believed one day she would, she should know of the silent love that had stirred the dead man’s heart. Who could tell?—it might still fall from heaven like purifying dew, refreshing and sanctifying her stern, troublous life.

CHAPTER VII.

ALL TENDS TO THE END.

“Great things sometimes arise from small, my masters,
As, if ye follow me, ye soon shall find.”

HE death of Laurence Carlton spread a gloom over the little village of Crofton. Every one had a kind pleasant memory of the careless, gay young fellow, who had been so suddenly snatched from among them; his genial nature had made him welcome wherever he went, for he always brought sunshine with him, except at his home; without thought or care, he had a natural way of winning a place in men's affections, and finding a warm corner in their hearts. Whatever his shortcomings might be at the Rectory, they

never suffered from them—indeed, those very qualities which wrought sorrow at home, made his popularity abroad. His follies were so interwoven with his better nature, that one could scarcely have been rooted out without damaging the other—as it happens in a corn-field, you cannot gather up the tares without uprooting the corn. His faults and his virtues were so mingled together, that they produced a pleasant surface effect; as the woof and the warp of two different colours in silk produce what is commonly called a shot. Many a better man has gone to his grave, and been less regretted than Laurence Carlton. There was a kind of romantic interest attached to the manner in which he met his fate, that lost none of its attractions when recounted, as it was recounted over and over, by the grateful Joe, who was always a welcome guest at the humblest fireside, and as much *fêted* and honoured, by his circle of lowly acquaintances, as Major Dundas, in his loftier rank, by the

upper ten thousand. Indeed, Joe, sociably speaking, was a man of no small importance in the village; everybody was ready to fly to serve him, always anxious to render him any service; he soon began to grow cheerful, and, if it had not been for his ceaseless regrets for "Master Laurie," he would have been the happiest and most contented man in the parish.

"He had gained more by the loss of his arms than he should ever have done by the use of his hands;" he used to say that if they were to grow again, he should not know what to do with them.

Lena's marriage was of course postponed. In vain Major Dundas grumbled, and reasoned, and pleaded; Mr. Carlton was obdurate, and indeed so was Lena herself, though Archibald tried hard to win her over to his side; if she would undertake to advocate their common cause, he fancied the Rector must consent—but she declined.

"If papa consented—even if he wished it,

Archie," she said, "*I* should refuse. I could not enter into my new life while sorrow for my poor brother lies so heavily upon our house. We cannot speak of him, scarcely think of him, without fresh tears."

"I don't object to that, but I should think in a week you might have the water laid on, and shed tears enough to wash him out of his grave," he answered, impatiently.

Lena looked up at him with an expression of angry surprise.

"Archie!" she exclaimed, "mamma said you were selfish; if she heard you now, she might add unfeeling. *I* think it is something worse than unfeeling to speak of my dead brother to *me* in that slighting way."

She had caught sight of Archibald's cloven foot, and he hastened to hide it; she was angry and hurt, he saw that, for she had never looked at him with so little love light in her eyes. He hastened to reply to her, with that frankness that constituted one

of his great charms, and at the same time was so misleading.

“My darling Lena, I know I must seem worse than a savage to speak in such a way—but this postponement of our marriage is a great trial to me—everything was going on so pleasantly; only think! in another week we should been travelling abroad, diving into all sorts of delightful places—no longer two separate beings, but *one*, with one life—one object—one love—one hope here and hereafter—to be so near to my life’s longing, and to have it snatched away—acknowledge that it is hard, Lena! I am not used to such disappointment, and I cannot bear it; besides, I do not see why our marriage should interfere with your mourning. I have got no foolish superstitions that way. You might put on your black the next day if you liked; you could grieve then as well as now—for when people really grieve, they do not do it after the fashion of a limited liability company, so

long and no longer, pay a certain tribute to the dead, and then close accounts. You surely cannot expect me to wait till Laurence is forgotten?"

"Oh! no, a few months at most, until the newness of our grief is worn off, and we are more reconciled to our loss. It would seem ominous, Archie, to go to the altar filled with sorrow for the dead; I should fear it would cast a shadow over our lives. I could not do it. I am sure I should see my poor brother standing there, instead of you, reproaching me for forgetting him so soon."

"Really this is too absurd, Lena. Laurie was far too good-natured to wish to stand in anybody's light, either living or dead; if he could only look down, and see how miserable he's making everybody, throwing everything out of gear, creating such discomfort and inconvenience, he'd long to come back and set matters all right, and wish he'd never have given his life to save that of your favourite Joe."

"Do not grumble any more, Archie, it pains me to hear you. The time will soon pass away, and things will look bright and happy again, as they should be at such a season. I think a wedding should take place under the fairest auspices—sunshine within and without; think what a gloom would hang over it now!"

"I should not object to that; indeed, if it would please you, we would make the ceremony as melancholy as possible—anything to get it over."

Notwithstanding all his arguments, for once in his life Archibald Dundas failed to carry his point, and was compelled to submit to the delay with the best grace he could. He wished from the bottom of his heart that "that interfering fellow Joe" had lost his legs instead of his arms, then he could not have brought the news so quickly.

The bride's trousseau was laid aside, strewn with lavender and dried rose-leaves; it was not without a feeling of deep regret that Lena

saw the soft silks, fine laces, and gay flowers put away in the large wardrobe, and covered over out of sight. When the morning that was to have ushered in her wedding-day came round, instead of the bright colours, graceful bridesmaids, and merry marriage bells ringing, a solemn awestruck feeling seemed to weigh upon their hearts, the house looked so mournful and sad, black around, black everywhere; and when Lena put on her crape, and outer symbols of grief, she felt as though she was in mourning for herself as well as for her brother. She crept silently up the stairs, opened her wardrobe, and, young-girl-like, lifted aside the covering, and looked with tender regret upon her bridal treasures. She could not bear to see them lying there in soft long folds, covered up as we cover the face of the dead, with no one to sigh over them, no one to regret them but herself—the mourning bride. She sat down and cried heartily, on this sad day that ought to have been so bright.

As time passed on, the Rectory wore its old aspect, and life gradually glided back, and went on in its accustomed way. The intercourse between it and the Manor-house had never been resumed from the time of Adrienne's disappearance, for which Madame de Fontaine still insisted that the Carltons were in some way accountable. Nothing had ever been heard or seen of her. Whatever Major Dundas knew he kept scrupulously to himself, and spent as much time at Crofton as his official duties would permit. Sir Frederic Trevor, too, was a frequent visitor to the village, and, when there, he always stayed at the Rectory, where he was still, as he had always been, a welcome guest. He could not tear himself away from his old haunts; he used to go his rounds, confining his visits chiefly to his poorer patients, and prescribing for them in a way that was quite beyond his means when he was the poor apothecary of the village. His bounty rendered his visits doubly welcome; wherever he went, he left a substantial bless-

ing behind him ; he had learned who were worthy and in need of help during his long sojourn among them, when his own poverty had often made his heart ache, as it kept him from relieving theirs. His bright, kindly nature had sometimes been darkened during his struggling days of obscurity, but now, in his prosperity, it shone out in a large-hearted, brilliant charity, which reached all who were in need within his sphere. He and Major Dundas rarely met without crossing swords in a wordy war, indulging, metaphorically speaking, in a continual game at ninepins, setting up and knocking over each other's theories in the most polite and courteous fashion. They were both well up in the game, and it was often difficult to say who got the mastery. Their perpetual warfare, the light skirmishing and sparring matches they indulged in, threw a little spirit into the life at the Rectory, enlivened the hours, and made the time pass pleasantly, that would otherwise have hung heavily enough.

Time, however, passed on. Again the wedding-day was fixed; and once more the Rectory became the scene of busy bustle and preparations. The hidden treasures were brought to light, the bright colours and silvery sheen again gleamed in the sunshine of admiring eyes and longing faces. The whole village was astir, and every cottage was busily arranging its humble offering, and selecting its fairest flowers, to throw beneath the beloved bride's feet, as she went in at the church doors, and passed out, for ever, from the young girlish life that had been spent so pleasantly among them. Sir Frederic Trevor had left Crofton, though the Rector most cordially invited him to remain for the wedding. He refused, alleging that urgent affairs demanded his presence elsewhere. Major Dundas had recovered his good temper, and was enjoying the task of arranging the programme of their present and future happiness. He could not spend quite so much time with Lena as he wished, owing to official duties, but, when away, he

was a daily correspondent. Every morning, when the post-bag opened its mouth, it dropped a treasure into Lena's hand, as the girl in the fairy tale dropped pearls and precious stones every time she spoke.

"Here, mamma dear, is a letter for you," exclaimed Lena, one morning, as she ransacked the post-bag in search of one invaluable document. Mrs. Carlton received her letter saying,

"From my brother—I hope it does not bring us a disappointment, and say he cannot come. He is such an erratic fellow, there is no knowing one day from another how he will engage himself, or what he is likely to be about. I do believe," she added, smiling, "he would consider a meeting for the discussion of public morals of more importance than your wedding, Lena."

"What a monster he must be!" laughed the young girl carelessly.

"Dear me, how very unfortunate!" exclaimed

Mrs. Carlton, as she perused her letter and laid it thoughtfully aside.

"No bad news, I hope?" said Lena anxiously.

"Well, not especially bad, and certainly not good," replied Mrs. Carlton. "There seems to be some little domestic difficulties in my brother's household; his children have been ill, and their governess has left him under 'peculiar circumstances,' he does not say what. He evidently wishes me to go up and set matters to rights: it is that which perplexes me. It is very inconvenient to leave home just at this time, when I am so much needed."

"Of course you must go," replied Lena. "What helpless creatures men are, when there is any domestic evil to grapple with! I will keep house while you are away, mamma, and a capital manager I shall make—it will give me a little more experience before I begin on my own account. When shall you start?"

"The sooner I go the better, for the sooner I shall return; of course I shall remain away

as short a time as possible, and hope to be back some days before the all-important one. I must wait to see your papa at luncheon, and this afternoon I will start by the 3.15 train."

Her little arrangements were soon made. Mr. Carlton approved of her plan. She could not do otherwise than go, he said, as it was evident her brother strongly desired her presence, though he was too delicate to express his wish. The Rector drove her to the station, and parted with her after many strict injunctions to be under no apprehension respecting the progress of home affairs, as all would no doubt go well, and she should hear every day from home.

Arriving in London in the course of a few hours, Mrs. Carlton went direct to Mr. Creswick's house. He said he was delighted and surprised to see her; he never intended that his letter should bring her up to town. Hypocrite that he was, he had been wondering all day whether she would come or not, and would have been

disappointed if she had kept away. Mrs. Carlton sat the whole of that evening listening to his troubles. There seemed to have been a general disturbance in the household, resulting in the dismissal of half the servants, and a general disorganization among the rest, which had driven him to his wit's end. There he stood, helpless and utterly incapable of steering clear among the domestic broils and quicksands that surrounded him. He, like many more of his sex, could stand upon a platform and talk wisely and well upon matters relating to moral culture, of the necessity and the rules for self-government, but let any little perplexities arise, which threw out of gear his domestic affairs, and he was adrift within an hour. To add to his troubles, the children had been ill, and at the very crisis, and as though to crown his annoyances, their governess had left them for some urgent reason, needless to relate here. Like a good general, Mrs. Carlton made herself thoroughly acquainted with her ground before she com-

menced the battle, sifting all the circumstances and weighing them well.

With her practical knowledge and general clear-sightedness, she managed to reduce things to something like order. She made a sweeping reformation, indeed discharged the whole household, and commenced operations with a new. It is fruitless to adopt minor measures, she argued, for if disaffection once creeps into a house, it spreads rapidly and infects every member; it is no use to dismiss one or two, the taint still remains behind—the ground must be cleared and the home new-made. The days wore on—till only about four or five intervened before that fixed for the marriage. Mrs. Carlton's most difficult task, that of obtaining a competent person as governess to her nieces, was satisfactorily concluded. She only awaited the arrival of the lady, to give her some general instructions, and see her comfortably settled *en famille*, before she returned to Crofton, which she was now anxious to do without delay. She sat in her

brother's dining-room, glancing occasionally, with some signs of impatience, at the clock. It was already one hour past the time appointed for Madame Deschamps's arrival. Mrs. Carlton was vexed, for she judged of character by small things rather than by great, and unpunctuality she considered a grave fault, and the precursor of many others. However, before her vexation had reached its utmost bounds, a cab drove up to the door, and the governess alighted. Mrs. Carlton smoothed her ruffled feathers, and went forward to greet her; at the same time she was prepared to administer a mild reproof, which meant a great deal when it fell from her lips. The lady herself seemed slightly agitated, and began to apologize for her unpunctuality.

"I am afraid I am late, Madame," she said, with a slightly foreign accent; "indeed I am very sorry, but I have only come now to ask your indulgence; I have brought my luggage with me as an earnest of good faith; I am ready to remain if you wish it, but I should

be grateful if you could spare me till to-morrow."

"Why?" inquired Mrs. Carlton, laconically, evidently displeased.

"I would not ask it for myself," continued the Frenchwoman, "but there is a young country-woman of my own in the house where I have been lodging, quite alone, and in great trouble."

"And how would your remaining with her until to-morrow help her out of her trouble?" asked Mrs. Carlton.

"Oh, I could set matters straight, and be tender and kind to her; she is friendless—her husband has deserted her, and her baby is scarcely two hours old. It broke my heart to leave her alone at such a time as this, when she needs so much love and care. She is very young, Madame, and very unhappy."

"I suppose she has a nurse, and such attendance as is necessary for her condition?" said Mrs. Carlton, with all her womanly sympathies awakened.

“Oh yes, she has such care as an old crone would be likely to give, who would as soon streak her young limbs for the grave as wrap her baby in its swaddling-clothes. If you could let me return until to-morrow—

“No,” replied Mrs. Carlton, decisively, “for little good could result from your doing so; none indeed but the indulgence of your own sympathetic feelings, and in this matter-of-fact world, Madame Deschamps,” she added, smiling, “we must not let our feelings interfere with our duty. A single omission may throw a whole state into commotion, as a thread awry will entangle a skein of silk.”

“Ah, Madame, but surely our feelings count for something,” began the Frenchwoman.

“For a great deal, but they must not be allowed to outweigh our judgment; our sense of duty should stand first. You have undertaken this situation as governess to my brother’s children, and it is right you should be here.”

Madame Deschamps’s face fell, but brightened

up as Mrs. Carlton continued, taking her hand in a cordial clasp,

“Your anxiety for your friend does credit to your kind heart; but the breach of your contract here could do no actual good to *her*. I will go to her myself, and see what can be done for her. She is a gentlewoman, I suppose, and poor?”

“A gentlewoman. Oh, yes; and poor, very poor, I think, though she never said so, but I see things and guess.”

Mrs. Carlton, always prompt to see and to act in any affair of emergency, fancied this was a case of urgent distress, and that the kind-hearted Frenchwoman, out of pure delicacy, concealed, so far as she could, her own charity and her friend's need. She ordered the brougham to be brought round at once, and, filling a small hamper with those delicate necessities which she thought would be acceptable to such an invalid, she started for Newman Street, where Madame Deschamps had given her the address of her suffering friend.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LOST ONE FOUND.

“Nay, let me look again! I know that face—
Ay! knew it years ago, before this stain
Had marred its beauty; but God give us grace
To ease her of this weary load of pain.”



RS. CARLTON'S carriage stopped at one of those tall, gloomy-looking houses, so numerous in the long, dismal streets which fashion has deserted—they look as if their gentility had received a death-blow, which they bear in solemn dignity, making no attempt to regain their lost position, but, submitting silently to the decree of change and time, go down slowly and gradually to decay. In vain their inhabitants give them fresh coats of paint,

call in the whitewasher's aid, and even put bright flowers in the windows—they will not look gay. It is like heaping decorations on the limbs and painting the face of the dead. When once the spirit has departed, no art can give the appearance of life and animation again.

Mrs. Carlton knocked at the door; it was opened by a decent elderly woman, who, in answer to her inquiry, directed her upstairs to the "three pair front." Mrs. Carlton commenced her toiling pilgrimage up the stairs. Arrived on the landing, she paused a moment, to recover her breath, before she entered the room. She tapped at the door, and, in obedience to the permission accorded in a gruff, thick voice, she crossed the threshold and looked around her. The room had a bare, forlorn appearance—there were no signs of "home" about it; there was a table, a few chairs, a rickety chest of drawers, a tolerably-sized bed, with heavy curtains on one side,

and a small square of carpet on the floor. A few tawdry pictures hung on the walls, and a cracked looking-glass above the mantel-piece completed the furniture of this attic, which was evidently let to the poor lady under the sounding title of "a furnished apartment." Hanging over the back of the chair, beside the fire, was some dainty baby-linen, soft flannels, and long white gowns, worked with great care and skill. The sight of these little delicate things brought a sad picture to Mrs. Carlton's mind; she fancied she could see the forlorn young mother, sitting there in that dull chamber, stitch, stitch, stitching, in dreary silence, through the long day or weary night, working till her fingers ached at those liliputian mysteries that were to enfold the expected treasure. She had been "deserted by her husband," the Frenchwoman had said; desertion and neglect are bitter things to bear at all times, but on such occasions as the present they are doubly poignant. The hours must have

passed with leaden wings, while the young wife sat there in her utter loneliness and desolation, mourning for the old love that was dead, buried, but unforgotten, grieving for the hopes that had withered away. But it was all over now, the sound of her great grief was dying away, and would henceforth come but as an echo of the past. A new interest had crept into her life, chasing away the shadows of the old, and bringing light, love, and hope new-born ; for if a babe brings nothing else into the world, it brings from spirit-land those invisible gifts, and lays them, like a solemn blessing, on the mother's breast. Mrs. Carlton's heart was filled with sadness—she seemed to take in and realise things spiritual, as her eye glanced on things material.

An old woman, covered with fusty rags, was stooping over the fireplace, and, with her skinny hands, grimed with dirt, was stirring something in a saucepan. She turned round as Mrs. Carlton came to her side, and showed a face

bloated with drink, expressive of a crafty cunning, and of nothing else. She stumbled up from her seat, and mumbled out some apologies as she offered the visitor a chair. A single glance told Mrs. Carlton that this was no fit person to have the charge of any invalid, especially of one whose delicate condition required the utmost vigilance and care. She positively polluted with her fetid breath the atmosphere of the sick-room, and filled it with the filthy effluvia of stale intoxicating liquors. It was no use to ask questions, or bandy words with such a creature as this—indeed, her very presence there told more of the utter friendlessness of the poor patient than any words would have done. “Who could have left her in such hands as these?” Mrs. Carlton resolved to ask this question of the landlady, and learn as much as she could relative to the poor lady before she left the house.

Meanwhile, she made some necessary inquiries of this miscalled “nurse,” and cast her eyes

round, to see for herself what had been done, and what was left undone. She had the hamper brought up from the carriage, speedily unpacked it, and arranged the little delicacies in a cupboard that was but ill supplied. She took the baby—and a poor puny little thing it was—out of its cradle, and examined it, to see if it had been properly dressed; she was not satisfied, and washed and re-dressed it over again, pointing out to the nurse where her omission and error had been. Having replaced it in its cradle, she looked into the saucepan, flung its pasty, drab-coloured contents, yclept gruel, under the grate, cleaned out the saucepan, and in a second was busily employed making some tempting, wholesome food for both mother and child. The woman, meanwhile, stood by, staring in stolid, half-drunken astonishment at Mrs. Carlton's proceedings, hazily impressed, no doubt, with the idea that she was some relative armed with a strong warrant for her acts, or she would no doubt have interfered,

and expelled her from the citadel with the force of an abusive, vulgar tongue.

Mrs. Carlton took no notice of her amazement, but went about her work as though she were alone in the room, and held supreme authority. Having completed her little arrangements, she approached the bed gently, lifted aside the curtains, and leaned over, to see if the new-made mother slept. Her face was turned to the wall, and the soft low sobs that broke faintly from her lips gave evidence of an unquiet spirit, that neither sorrow nor pain could hush to rest. Mrs. Carlton took the thin white hand that lay upon the coverlet in hers, and pressed it with a caressing motion, as she said, tenderly—

“My poor girl, you are very ill; you ought not to be alone here. Is there no one you would like to see?”

“No,” murmured the poor lips, faintly.

“Have you no friends?”

“None—none in the world.”

Mrs. Carlton thought she had never heard a sound so full of melancholy meaning—those few words contained a world of sadness. They fell upon the ear, too, like the ghostly echo of some familiar voice. She passed her hand with a soft caressing motion over the invalid's forehead, and smoothed the hair off her face, for it was lying cold and damp over her cheeks, wet with the deluge of tears, which were still creeping steadily down between the closed eyelids. There is a mesmeric power in the touch of some hands, which seems to communicate sympathetic feeling to the spirit, as it passes lightly over the flesh. Some such influence seemed to stir the young mother now, for as she felt the soft soothing touch pass over her, she moved upon her pillow, turned towards the light, and half opened her eyes. Mrs. Carlton stooped forward, intending to leave a kiss of promise on the brow, and a few words of hope and comfort in her ear. At that moment the light fell full upon the invalid's face ; she opened her

eyes wide, and fixed them on the veiled figure beside her. Mrs. Carlton was half hidden by the heavy bed-curtains; she stopped suddenly, and drew back with a stifled exclamation of amazement; then, letting the curtain fall dexterously, so as to keep herself entirely concealed from the sufferer's eyes, she stooped forward again, pressed a long tender kiss upon her cheek, and clasped her thin hand with a firm assuring clasp; but she spoke not a single word—she dared not trust her voice. Then, withdrawing silently from the bed, she sat down at the far end of the room, looking white with wonder and perplexity. She had found the fugitive, the long-lost Adrienne, at last! She was completely dumbfounded, the surprise of the discovery was so great. How well she remembered that night at the Rectory—the very last time she had seen Adrienne's face! How despairingly the poor girl had pleaded!—how utterly forlorn she had seemed! As Mrs. Carlton thought of these things, her heart smote

her; she fancied she ought to have been more tender than she had been over the wounded, passionate thing; that she could—that she ought to have done something to have helped, and saved her from her own wilful nature, which had brought her to such a pass as this.

“Deserted by her husband!—what a wretched scoundrel must that husband be who would desert such a creature as Adrienne!” Mrs. Carlton mentally ejaculated, and she inwardly prayed to God not to allow such infamy to go unpunished.

As she passed out of the door, in order to speak to the landlady, and gain all possible information concerning her lodger, the old woman shuffled after her, and laying her skinny hand on Mrs. Carlton’s shoulder, detained her for a moment. As she leered at her with bleared red eyes, she whispered, craftily—

“Don’t believe her—it’s a lie—she *has* got friends, or where does she get the fi’ pun note as comes here reg’lar once a month!”

And chuckling to herself knowingly, as though she had played a very clever card, the old crone hobbled back into the room, and shut the door with a sharp click. Mrs. Carlton went down the stairs, and paused at the parlour door, where she heard the voices of young children at play. Before she had time to knock for admittance, the landlady, the matronly woman whom she had seen before, came out into the passage with a child in her arms.

Mrs. Carlton noticed the little prattler, then apologised for stopping the mother, adding,

“I hope you will excuse my intruding upon you, but I am deeply interested in the poor lady I have been visiting, and I shall be glad to receive any information that you can give me respecting her.”

“It’s very little that I can tell you, but if you will walk in and sit down for a few minutes, I shall be very glad to tell you all I know; especially if it will do her any

good, poor thing," replied the landlady, with a kind motherly air that won Mrs. Carlton's heart. "She came here about six months ago, and, if you'll believe me, ma'am, she has never left this house from the moment she crossed the threshold!"

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Carlton, with a look of incredulous amazement, "do you mean to say she has lived for six months in that small room, and never left it—never—even to take exercise?"

"If you'd been here, and heard her, as I have, pacing up and down her room for hours, sometimes the whole night through, you'd think she had exercise enough. I was obliged to stop that sort of thing, for my other lodgers gave me warning; they said it was like living in a haunted house, it disturbed them so to hear her footsteps, patter, patter, pattering above their heads, when all Christian folk ought to be in their beds asleep. I told her of it, and spoke to her kindly,

for I thought she must have something on her mind, and might like to make a friend of me; I think, ma'am, it's a comfort to be able to talk over one's troubles in a friendly way, even with a stranger. I shall never forget when my husband was out of work, in the bitter cold weather, and the children down with the scarlet fever, if it hadn't been for my neighbours dropping in to talk over my troubles, I never could have got through 'em. But the poor thing didn't seem to see it in that light: she kept as close as wax, and when I told her she ought to go out for a little fresh air, it made my heart ache to see her smile and thank me in a melancholy sort of way, as if she didn't care much whether she lived or died. But after that she used to come down and walk in our back-yard for an hour or two in the day-time. I think she did it just to satisfy me. She's mighty proud and dignified in her ways, though; it was no use trying to make friends with her, I soon

found that out; so I let her go her ways, and I went mine. She's a right to be as mysterious as she likes, and so that my rent's regularly paid, and all things respectable, my lodgers' affairs are no business of mine."

"But she has no friends, no visitors? If she never goes out on any business, how does she live?—how can she obtain the necessaries of life?"

"Oh! that's easily explained. On the first of every month, as regular as the month comes round, a gentleman calls (he never asks to see her, nor she asks nothing about him) and leaves a sealed envelope containing a five-pound note. I know that, for she sometimes opens it before me, and I get it changed and buy everything she wants; it isn't much, poor thing, for she almost lives on coffee, eggs, and bread and butter, and sometimes a taste of meat two or three times a week. There's been a French lady lodging here in the next room to her, for the last month;

they seemed to strike up a great intimacy on a sudden, for they was always parleyvooing together, talking some foreign stuff, as though English wasn't good enough for 'em: she left this morning, and I'm not sorry for it, for it was hurtful to my feelings to see my lodgers confabulating with one another, and me being kept at a distance, never understanding a word they said; not that I'm curious, but I do like to be as wise as other people."

"But who provided the nurse—the woman I have seen upstairs?" asked Mrs. Carlton.

"Mr. Brown, the apothecary round in Goodge Street, recommended *her*. If it had been trusted in my hands, I should have provided different."

"And who employed Mr. Brown? If this lady has never been out, she could have had nothing to do with the choice; and judging by the nurse, I should judge indifferently of the doctor."

“I don’t know—I never asked any questions; and, as I said before, I don’t pry into things that don’t concern me, provided my rent’s paid and my lodgers respectable.”

This was all she could tell of Adrienne. The information was meagre enough, and sad enough; but Mrs. Carlton resolved to make the most of it. She walked, desiring the carriage to follow her, round to the residence of Mr. Brown, in Goodge Street, hoping to learn something more from him. It was a small, dingy-looking chemist’s shop, with dirty windows and a generally dusty untidy look, betokening anything but a thriving trade. The apothecary himself, a little wizened old man in spectacles, was behind the counter, rubbing his hands; smiling and bowing, he came forward to greet her. She came to the point at once.

“You are attending a lady at 13A Newman Street,” she said; “I am very anxious about her, and I wish to know——”

“No need for any anxiety, madam—none

whatever," simpered the little man. "She is doing uncommonly well, could not be better, and—"

"I am not speaking of her health," exclaimed Mrs. Carlton, cutting him short; "I can judge of that myself. I wish to know by whose authority you have attended her?"

"Well," replied the apothecary, completely taken aback by her mode of attack, and answering her in a hesitating, uncertain way, "I—ahem!—you will excuse me for observing that—that is rather a strange question. If you have any complaint to make, it should be made to me. *I* am the only responsible person—and I believe I have done my duty."

"I dare say you have. I have no complaint to make on that score," replied Mrs. Carlton coolly; "I merely wish for a simple answer to my question, if you will so far oblige me."

"Certainly, I can have no objection to your being acquainted with my friend, who occupies a first-rate position in society, speaking socially as well as professionally. His business lies chiefly

among the aristocracy; and any little peculiar, left-handed matter that falls in his way—you understand,” he added significantly—“he kindly entrusts to me, and I have always conducted matters satisfactorily. In the present instance I am not aware of having failed in my duty;” he looked with a sharp inquiring eye into Mrs. Carlton’s face, as though to find out what was her motive for prying into this affair. He glanced his eye at the door, and saw the smart carriage waiting there; this increased his surprise and heightened his respect. “I am always deeply interested in my patients, and especially so in this young lady. Seeing she has no friends, I——”

“You are mistaken—she has friends, and I am one,” said Mrs. Carlton, interrupting him unceremoniously. “You will excuse me for reminding you that you are losing your time, and wasting mine. Oblige me with the name of your professional friend, and I will detain you no longer.”

Mr. Brown saw that she was determined to carry her point. He had no particular object, indeed, none whatever, in concealing the name of the physician who had placed Adrienne's case in his hands; but somehow, in this instance, he had a kind of presentiment that some evil would arise out of her knowledge of it. In vain he tried to baffle her curiosity, and lead her away from the subject—she quietly ignored all he said, and came back steadily to her first question; at last she received the name of Dr. Frederic Swallow from his lips—his address was Mount Street, Grosvenor Square.

Having thanked Mr. Brown for his civility, she, re-entering the carriage, desired the coachman to drive to Dr. Swallow's house. There everything was luxuriously arranged, with all the care and grace that money and taste could bestow; from the gilded ceilings, the rich paintings on the wall, down to the velvet pile carpet beneath the feet—all alike gave

evidence of wealth, ease, and comfort. She was shown into an elegant little drawing-room, or rather boudoir, for it was a perfect gem of its kind, filled with rare costly articles and graceful knick-knackeries. Mrs. Carlton had scarcely time to look round her, when the door of the adjoining room, where the lord of the mansion was breakfasting, was thrown open, and he sauntered leisurely into the room. Mrs. Carlton rose up from her seat, the two exchanged courtesies, and then stood looking at each other for a moment. Dr. Swallow handed her a chair, and begged her to be seated. He was a tall, strikingly handsome man, about thirty, dressed in an elaborately-trimmed dressing-gown and embroidered slippers, for which costume he apologized, saying he was in the middle of his breakfast, it being a much earlier hour than he generally received his patients. Mrs. Carlton received the implied rebuke with a polite bow. "If her business was not very urgent, *would* she allow him to finish a cup of chocolate?"

He made the inquiry in an insinuating tone, smiling, and showing a superb set of white teeth as he spoke. She could do no less than apologize for thus disturbing him; she begged that she might inconvenience him no further, and that if he would continue his breakfast, she would unfold her business to him without taking him from his meal. "As she was so very considerate, he would certainly avail himself of her kindness," he said, at the same time ushering her into his morning-room. The unfinished repast was still upon the table, and interspersed among toast and muffins were the morning papers, journals, and letters, that had been opened and carelessly flung aside. A large tortoise-shell cat was purring on the hearthrug. He placed a comfortable chair for Mrs. Carlton, opposite his own, and offered her a cup of chocolate. She refused. "Perhaps she preferred tea or coffee? She had only to speak the word, and it should be brought to her at once."

With cool, dignified composure, Mrs. Carlton

declined his offered hospitality; there was something in his manner that was very offensive to her, a free-and-easy familiarity, mingled with politeness, which amounted, in her eyes, to a species of unwarrantable impertinence. She was not accustomed to be treated with so much freedom, and replied to him with frigid politeness. She could not, however, but feel the awkwardness of her own position, being an intruder in his house. Somehow she felt a greater difficulty in broaching her business to this man than she had expected. However, plunging boldly into the matter at last, she said,

“I have come here on a very painful business, Dr. Swallow.”

“My dear madam,” he exclaimed, interrupting her, and pausing with a spoonful of egg half-way to his lips, “if it be really a painful business, pray spare me for the present. I have a delicate digestion, and anything unpleasant before breakfast throws my organs out of order

for the rest of the day; for that reason I never see my patients until after twelve o'clock."

"I do not think my business is at all likely to affect your digestion," answered Mrs. Carlton. "I merely wish to inquire if you can give me any satisfactory information respecting a young lady at 13A Newman Street, to whom, I believe, you have kindly supplied medical attendance in a sad necessity? I presume, therefore, that you are acting under the authority of her friends?"

At the first mention of the young lady in Newman Street, Dr. Swallow pursed up his mouth, and looked beneath his eyelashes at Mrs. Carlton, as though to learn what information she required, and how much she already knew. For a moment she remained silent, waiting for him to reply; seeing he did not seem inclined to favour her with an answer, she added,

"I have been told that she is deserted by her husband, and yet there are some signs which

show she is not quite forsaken. Am I right? Is my information so far correct?"

"Well, yes," he answered, deliberately, "you are right, and yet you are wrong. In the first place, there is no desertion; no husband in the case, and certainly she is not forsaken."

Mrs. Carlton's heart sank, and for a second it seemed as though it had ceased to beat—blood seemed to have receded from it, and rushed back again and flew up into her face, covering her cheek and brow with crimson. She did not speak—she could not. Alas! what could she ask?—what could she say? She sat still, watching and waiting for him to speak—eager, and yet dreading to hear what he might have to tell. But Dr. Swallow was by no means inclined to be communicative; he resumed his breakfast, and proceeded to crack another egg.

"But, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Carlton, in evident agitation, "you will, at least, tell me who—how this dreadful thing has happened?"

"Really you ask too much," he answered.

"I cannot disclose my professional secrets, even to a lady of your superior attraction."

"You disgrace your profession," she answered, stung by his light words and manner, "when you become the confidant and the acting agent of these degrading secrets."

"Degrading as they may be, they must be still interesting, since you are so anxious to unravel them."

"I will know!—I will know!" muttered Mrs. Carlton, half to herself, half aloud.

"Not from me," he said, decidedly; then, resuming his old tone, he added, "I am sorry to seem disobliging, but really I am surprised at a lady of your position mixing herself up in such affairs as these. You can do no good, and only compromise yourself. I can understand your feeling very much interested in this young person—a remarkably handsome girl, I've heard; but female philanthropy may be carried too far—in this case it is quite

unnecessary, as everything that is correct and honourable will be done."

"I should not think you were a fit judge of what is or what is not honourable," said Mrs. Carlton, getting more and more indignant.

"Possibly we might take opposite views of the subject," he said, "but I assure you Major Dundas is——"

He stopped short. The name had evidently slipped from his lips unawares, but she had caught it, and repeated the word "Dundas" in an accent of horror and amazement. Dr. Swallow's face flushed with annoyance and suppressed anger; he protested that he knew no such person—that she had mistaken the name. In vain he tried to cover the mistake he had made. Mrs. Carlton let him talk on, and made neither answer to nor comment on his words. Her own thoughts and feelings occupied her wholly; they were vague and unde-

fined. That name had thrown her whole soul into a state of commotion—filled it with scraps of broken thoughts and fears; there was nothing whole, nothing tangible—not even her own senses. Mingling together, and floating before her mental vision, were the faces of Lena Carlton, Archibald Dundas, and Adrienne de Fontaine; gleams of the bright wedding-day that was drawing so near flashed before her. Calm and collected as Mrs. Carlton generally was, she was not so now; if anyone had asked her to reduce her feelings to words, she could not have done it; they were so conflicting—so contradictory—so overwhelming. For a second she had even forgotten where she was. Presently, with a deep-drawn sigh, she exclaimed, quickly—

“To-day is Thursday, and she is to be married on Saturday!”


She asked no more questions, spoke not another word, but curtseying to Dr. Swallow, straightway left the house, leaving that distin-

guished physician amazed, and half impressed with an idea that he had entertained, if not a lunatic, one who was verging near upon it.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HERO AT BAY.

“ His honour rooted in dishonour stood,
And faith, unfaithful, kept him falsely true.”

T seven o'clock that evening Mrs. Carlton sat in her brother's drawing-room, alone, pale, with compressed lips and a look of desperate determination in her eyes. Immediately on her return home from her interview with Dr. Swallow, she had written to Major Dundas, who was then in London, requesting him to call on her immediately. It was now seven o'clock, and he had not come; she expected him every moment. Busy thoughts and hopes and fears were buzzing about her brain.

Had she been deceived? Was he, or was he not, the man she wished to see? She might have mistaken the name, or the name might be borne by some other man—not Archie—not the man who was to be Lena's husband. She had never liked Archibald Dundas—indeed, her feeling against him at one time was almost strong enough to be called an antipathy. In proportion as this feeling had increased, she had feared to be unjust to him; she had schooled herself, and toned her feelings down, until reflecting on his greater qualities only, and on Lena's love, she had tried, and almost begun to like him. She resolved that she would not misjudge him now. She would wait until his own lips had pronounced him Guilty, or Not Guilty. Then—ah! then the worst would be still to come.

The clock had scarcely finished striking the hour, when she heard his sharp knock at the door; in another moment his quick decided tread was upon the stairs. The door was

thrown open, and "Major Dundas" announced. He hurried forward with outstretched hand to meet her, his handsome face, however, slightly shaded with anxiety.

"My dear Mrs. Carlton," he said, "anything wrong?" Then he added, in a tone of fear: "All is well at Crofton?"

"Oh! yes," replied Mrs. Carlton, "all is well at Crofton."

"Thank God for that!" he ejaculated, tossing the hair from his forehead as he threw himself into a chair.

For a second Mrs. Carlton sat looking in his face: her clasped hands falling in her lap, she hardly knew how to frame her speech, the subject was so strange, so painful, so unrighteous.

Seeing that she did not speak, and noticing the perplexity of her look, he continued, gazing steadily in her face,

"You say all is well at Crofton! you did not send for me to tell me that! Lena——"

The word had scarcely fallen from his lips, when Mrs. Carlton said, watching him narrowly as she spoke,

“It is nothing concerning Lena that I have to say to you. It is of Adrienne de Fontaine!”

The pronunciation of that name produced a magic effect on Major Dundas. If she had discharged a pistol in his face, he could not have bounded from his chair in greater wrath. Every particle of colour left his face: he became white, even to his lips—and his steel-blue eyes seemed to strike sparks of fire, as he exclaimed, and his clenched fist fell upon the table as he spoke, echoing her name,

“Adrienne! has she dared to carry this vile scandal to Lena’s ears at last?”

He glared furiously at Mrs. Carlton, as though she had been the traitor who had betrayed him. She bore his look without flinching.

“Guilty!” was the unuttered verdict her

heart pronounced against him; but with her lips she answered,

"No; she has carried no vile scandal to Crofton, and, but for the fortunate chance that took me to her side, she might have carried it with her to the grave."

"Then, in heaven's name, to the grave let it go!" he exclaimed impatiently. "I see, the very mention of Adrienne's name tells me at once that the whole of this unfortunate story is known to you. Allow me to ask you one question, Mrs. Carlton—What good end do you hope to gain by bringing it against me now, at such a time as this?"

Mrs. Carlton was completely dumbfounded at the way in which he had received her communication. She had expected he would be covered with confusion, full of excuses, and ready to bring forward extenuating circumstances, even if he did not altogether deny his guilt. Instead of which, he had accepted the position at once, giving no evidence of

shame, speaking no word of regret! Anger and indignation for a moment kept her silent.

“I hardly know whether I am most shocked or surprised at your conduct,” she said at last. “Most men feel, or at least express, some feeling of shame or remorse, when their bad deeds are discovered—but you, at least, are no hypocrite, for you do neither.”

“No,” he answered, with scornful curling lip, “hypocrisy, as you say, is not one of my vices, and if you expect me to come like a stray lamb, repentant and bleating, to be taken back to the fold, you will be deceived. To you, at least, I am not accountable for my actions——”

“You *are* accountable, to every honest man and woman, too, for the misery and ruin you have wrought; but to me you are doubly accountable—you are the affianced husband of the child I love.”

Mrs. Carlton’s voice faltered; for Lena’s bright, happy face floated before her mind, and

filled her eyes with tears. He, too, seemed affected by her allusion to Lena; an expression of pain crossed his face, as he said,

“I regret, as bitterly as any man can do, this unfortunate episode in my life; but regret can be of no avail now—it is all passed; and however deeply it may be regretted, it cannot be recalled. Why bring the wretched affair forward now, when I am turning my back upon my past life, and about to begin a new one? We have all some skeleton that we are anxious to hide—why not bury this with the rest—as men bury their dead?”

“You think only of yourself, in your cool philosophical scheme of forgetting,” replied Mrs. Carlton. “It is easy enough for you to bury and forget your share in this shameful business; but what is to become of her who is the great sufferer? Can she cast off and bury her shame, as you throw off and bury yours? It may be light to you, but it lies heavily on her; she must carry it with her to

the grave. Why should you go free, while she is so bitterly punished? You, who are the greater sinner, should be the greater sufferer!"

"I knew you always hated me," he answered angrily. "I have fallen into your power, and you bring all your hatred to bear upon me now—you speak without reason, and with bitterness. You are not accustomed to deal with such matters as these."

"Thank God, no!" she ejaculated, fervently.

"And you consider them," he continued, "with the narrow and contracted mind of a woman."

"Most heartily I trust," she said, "that few men regard these things with the wide, extended mind of such as you!" She paused a second, then added, "You tell me you regret the past, and although such wrongs as these can never be made right, yet some atonement must be made."

"I am willing, indeed anxious, to do everything that is right and honourable—" he began.

"Honourable!" she repeated the word with bitter emphasis; "we had better keep that word 'honourable' out of this miserable business—the shame and dishonour of it sickens me."

"You think too seriously—in your eyes my folly is magnified."

"Folly!—give it the right name, and call it crime. Is it no more than folly to destroy the good name and fame of a woman?—to fill the present with tears, the future with ashes?—to leave a stain upon a human life that no tear can wash away, no penitence can make clean?—no more than 'folly' to bring a son into the world that knows no father, owns no name, and must even blush at that of 'mother,' a name that all men hold as sacred as their own honour! Think, Major Dundas, what would be your feelings now, as you stand there, a grown man, a brave soldier, if you were forced to blush for your mother's shame, and bear the burthen of your father's sin?"

"That we have all done," he answered,

“from the time of Adam downwards; but I must say, you put in a ridiculously serious light a matter that is, after all, too common to rouse a world’s wonder.”

“More shame for you, who have helped to make it common; and more pity for the world that bears the burthen. Such occurrences as these are a crying disgrace to this Christian land. You may have done good service abroad, but you have wrought misery and desolation at home. A hero in the field you are, but a cowardly traitor at home. You have betrayed, where you should have protected, have stained and assaulted the fair fame of a woman, when you would not have dared to assail the honour of a man.”

Mrs. Carlton’s words fell like blows on Archibald’s ear. He winced beneath them, but he had no power to strike again. He sat glaring at her with angry eyes, his nostrils dilating with gathering passions; his hands nervously twitching his fair moustache, which quivered

above his thin, trembling lips. His proud, strong spirit quailed beneath a woman's stern, reproving look. After a moment's pause, she added,

"Your name, Major Dundas, has become a household word in England; wherever it is spoken, men, ay, and women too, are ready to stand up and give you all the honour and the gratitude you have justly won. Every man is proud to know you. But this one cruel act mars all. You have tainted your name, given up your title to respect, your right to be esteemed. Henceforth your friendship is no honour to men, and a disgrace to women; every honest home would close its doors upon you; for though you have been a brave soldier, you are a dishonoured man."

He almost foamed at the mouth with anger as she spoke; if she had been a man, he would have strangled her upon the spot. He rose up, and paced to and fro the room, as he said with bitter emphasis,

“You know how to use the privilege of your sex, and give free license to your tongue. It is easy for you to look down from the supreme height of your immaculate, untried virtue, and lash the spirits of those who stumble and fall. If your only object in sending for me was to blacken my character, to give a fabulous description of my doings, to set me up as a kind of bogey to frighten old women and children, the sooner it is over the better. On the other hand, if you have really any philanthropical intentions of doing any good in this unfortunate business, I shall be happy to talk it over in a reasonable way. I have already told you I am willing and anxious to remedy any evil that has been done.”

“Ah! Major Dundas,” said Mrs. Carlton, sadly, “in whatever way it may be remedied, I feel it will be but a poor piece of patchwork at the best; such wrongs as these can never be set wholly right.”

“Then perhaps we had better not make the

attempt," he answered; "let the matter rest as it is, and——"

"No," said Mrs. Carlton, interrupting him, "something must be done—we will do our best. It is true you can never give back to this poor girl the good name you have taken away; but you can still shield her from the world's scorn, by giving her your own."

Archibald stared at her for a moment in mute amazement, then burst into a grating laugh that it was painful to hear.

Mrs. Carlton returned his gaze with a look of angry surprise.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I fancied we were discussing this matter seriously; I had no idea you would turn it into a jest."

"Jest!" echoed Mrs. Carlton, indignantly, "I do not know by what ingenious method you can twist my words, to make them bear the seeming of a jest."

"Can you really be serious?" he said.

"Knowing that I have one chosen bride already, are you anxious to provide me with another? You must know that, by God's will and mine, Lena Carlton will be my wife before three days have passed."

"You are mad to think so!" exclaimed Mrs. Carlton. "Can you for a moment suppose that, knowing what I know, the marriage will be allowed to proceed?"

"Not if *you* have power to prevent it!" he replied, darting a glance of fire upon her. After a moment's pause he smothered his wrath, and added, "But you will not, Mrs. Carlton—you cannot be so cruel to Lena, whatever you may be to me. It will kill *her* and blast my prospects for ever." There was fear and trembling in his accents as he added, "I never thought I could stoop to ask for mercy from the hands of any man or woman either; but I do ask it of you! I regret as bitterly as a man can do the folly—well, call it by what name you will—we need not quibble about

words. I will submit the matter to your discretion—leave it in your hand—do whatever you advise—make *any* sacrifice but one——”

“That is,” said Mrs. Carlton, interrupting him, “you are willing to do anything but the one, the only thing, that can be of any avail in this sad strait. You will buy your redemption at the lowest possible price.”

“Phrase it as you please,” he answered; “I will do anything but sacrifice myself or Lena. Look this matter steadily in the face—consider it reasonably. Why should you carry this painful story to Crofton? What good can come of it? Think for a moment. If some kind friend were to travel backwards through the life of any man, or woman either, and gather up all stray thoughts, words, or wilful acts committed, and lay them before the altar on the wedding-day, what would become of the favors and flowers? Who would get there without stumbling over a thousand follies?—or who could stand there with a pure conscience, except—

except perhaps my darling Lena herself? But you will not do this? You could not be so cruel to her—so merciless to me!”

He was now fearfully agitated and sick at heart. He had never felt fear before. He had faced perils and dangers—even death itself in its most terrible form—and never trembled; but he trembled now. He feared lest he might lose his bride! Selfish as he was—cool, calculating or indifferent on many matters—he had always loved Lena Carlton; indeed, all the fire and passion of his nature was absorbed by love for her, and in the pride of his profession. He gloried, most of all, in the fame he had won, and the praises that resounded to his honour, because he knew that they reached her ears, and warmed the hearts of those he loved in that quiet village home at Crofton. When he grew tired, as he often did, of the feverish excitements, dazzled by the strong light that beat upon his life in London, then there was always a welcome for him at the Rectory. He could

fold his wings, and sink to a luxurious rest among friends who loved him. No matter whether sick or sorrowful, harassed in body, or troubled in mind, there was always a refuge for him there. Was all this to end?—were those hospitable doors to be closed upon him? Were their hearts to be turned against him, and his name, so familiar to their lips, be so no more? He could not bear it. His heart swelled into his throat; but for very shame he could have wept. He would rather have stood face to face, unarmed, before his deadliest enemy, or borne the brunt of the fiercest battle, than meet the gaze of Mrs. Carlton's all-condemning eye. He was utterly defenceless; by his own act he had lost the right—the power to defend himself. She never thought her heart could have softened towards this miserable sinner, but it did. She commiserated the sinner, but she had no idea of compounding for the sin. As she looked upon his face, her thoughts flew to that other white face, so wan in its death-

like pallor, and helpless and still. Her heart then hardened towards him, and she said, calmly,

“What is it you wish, or expect me to do, Major Dundas?”

“To keep silent on this unfortunate matter for the present,” he replied, beseechingly.

“You ask what is impossible,” she said, decidedly. “How could I, in faith to my husband, in justice to his child, be silent? Knowing what I know, I should be in act, if not in words, a traitor to my own home, if I allowed this matter to pass. The man who has been false and cruel to one woman, is no fit husband for another. I am sorry for you, Major Dundas—sorry for the actors, as well as for the sufferers in this sad business; but my duty lies straight before me, and I must not, I will not shrink from it; however painful, however bitter the task may be, I *must* carry this tale to Crofton. I shall make no comment, but state the facts, and leave my

husband, leave Lena herself to act, unbiassed by any opinion of mine."

Archibald Dundas saw it was no use endeavouring to dissuade Mrs. Carlton from doing what she thought right. He was full of fury, and yet quivering with pain.

"You may go your way," he said, "and I shall go mine; and we will see which gains the day. If you were her mother, you would hesitate before you struck such a blow as this. You strike out of hate to me, not from love to her. All the sorrow and the pain now rests on Adrienne and on me, who are neither of us free from blame; but you will not let it rest on the guilty only—you will not let it be wiped out—you will spread the taint farther; carry misery and desolation into your own household; ring out a death-knell, when the joy-bells are ready to send forth a merry peal; throw dust and ashes over the wedding flowers and favors; turn showers of joy to tears of blood, and all for duty, for conscience

sake! It was such inexorable consciences as yours that sent a Cranmer to the stake, a Fisher to the block. There are times when virtue goes a step too far, and becomes more foul and ugly than the vice she punishes. Well, go your way, madam, and I shall go mine. We shall see who will use most speed to carry this tale to Crofton."

He strode from the room, and left Mrs. Carlton bewildered by his attack, but disposed to think and reflect more fully upon the matter. She knew that her communication would give a death-blow to Lena's life. It was cruel to speak, yet cruel to be silent. She could not, she dared not keep the terrible secret—there was no choice of action for her; she must wring their hearts at home, even as her own was wrung. There was no help for it—none.

As she thought over her interview with Major Dundas, she grew dissatisfied, she had left so many things unsaid. She hardly knew what she wished, or what would be the wisest

thing to do; she only knew what was right and honest to be done.


In the midst of her grief at the blow that was impending over Lena's head, she did not forget poor Adrienne's darker sorrow. Early in the morning she paid a visit to Newman Street, discharged the nurse, and made liberal arrangements with the landlady (in whose charge she left her) for Adrienne's comfort and care. She left no name, neither would she see Adrienne herself, as she felt the surprise and humiliation of the meeting, under existing circumstances, might have a fatal effect on the unfortunate girl.

Having arranged matters in the best way she could, she started by the 10.20 train for Crofton, sick and sorrowful at heart.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE MIDST OF JOY COMETH SORROW.

“Lo! when the sun is warm and bright,
And bounding hearts beat high and light,
The storm-cloud—riding dark and high,
Dissolves in tears the shining sky.”

VERYTHING was in an advanced stage of preparation for the wedding—indeed, correctly speaking, the preparations were completed—the house was all in order—the arrangements for the breakfast perfect—every flower fell in its right place, and hope and expectation sat smiling on every face. Lena might have folded her hands, and sat down quietly waiting until the bridegroom came, but she found that a hundred little nothings were

to be done. She flitted about the house, giving light, lingering touches here and there, speaking last words over and over again, and slipping many times in and out of her father's study, where he was gravely composing his Sunday's sermon. Many were the soft kisses, and tender, thoughtful words that passed between the father and his child. A sweet and solemn sunshine seemed to beam upon the hearts of both. They had no misgivings, no thought of the storm-cloud that was drifting nearer and nearer every moment that passed, and so soon to burst over them and extinguish the joy-beacons that were burning now so brightly. Grace was buzzing about the house, as busy as a bee, flying from one end of the house to the other, giving the word of command here, there, and everywhere, and by as frequently countermanding it, creating a general confusion.

Lena was in her room, taking a last farewell look at some of her childish treasures, which

she had been collecting from her earliest years. As she glanced over them, one by one, such a host of pleasant broken memories came bubbling up before her that she would almost have desired to go back and live some of those precious hours over again.

"Here, Lena, Lena, dear!" exclaimed Grace, bursting into the room, "do throw away that trash, and let us have our dresses tried on—suppose they do not fit, what a pretty pucker we shall be in to-morrow!"

"You can try on yours, Grace," replied Lena, "but I shall not put on mine; I have heard that it is unlucky for a bride to put on her dress till the wedding morning."

"What folly, Lena! I thought you were above such superstitious nonsense. Look!" she pointed to the window as she spoke, "I have heard it is good luck for two crows to fly over the housetop, and here they come, flapping their wings as fast as they can fly! So you see one good omen stands against one bad."

"Caw! caw! caw!" screamed the birds, as they flew over the housetop.

"Only your crows happen to be rooks this time!" said Lena, laughing.

"That does not signify a bit—it will be just the same in the end, as you will see. Do come."

And she persistently dragged her unwilling sister off. The dressmaker was upstairs, and in a few minutes the dresses were on, and the pulling, pinching, lacing, and laughing began.

"You look perfectly lovely, Lena," exclaimed Grace, turning her sister about, and admiring her on all sides with more than common good-nature; "and I do not look bad by any means," she added, casting satisfied glances on the looking-glass. "Really I begin to think that being a bridesmaid is better fun than being a bride."

As they stood chattering lightly, they saw Mrs. Carlton drive up to the Rectory gate. Lena would have taken off her dress and

hurried down to receive her, but Grace prevented her, saying that Mrs. Carlton ought to see her as she was, in order, if there was any alteration to be made, that she might suggest it at once, adding, "For she has sharper eyes, and understands these things better than we do."

They gave a few finishing touches to their toilettes, and then, arm in arm, descended the stairs. Mrs. Carlton by this time had entered the study, and her husband gladly threw aside his papers to receive her.

He had scarcely time to remark the worn and painful expression of her countenance, when the door was gently opened, and the two girls, looking radiantly beautiful in their soft white bridal dresses, stood in the open doorway. When Mrs. Carlton looked round, and beheld those shining figures, beaming with pleasure, and brightening with the joy that was to come, her heart seemed to contract with a sharp, sudden pain. For a second she was too much overcome to speak; at last with bitter anguish in her

voice and on her face, she exclaimed, with a kind of shriek,

“Oh! take it off, child, go away and take it off!”

She shivered, covered her eyes, covered her face, and burst into an hysterical flood of tears; the first she had shed for many a year. For the last few days her nervous system had been in a constant state of agitation; every nerve had been stretched to its utmost tension—now they gave way. The sight of Lena, looking so pure, so fair, so serenely happy, was too much for her; she knew her bright face would soon be clouded, and her heart wrung with its first great overwhelming sorrow, so she broke down utterly, and sobbed like a girl. In a second Lena was by her side, and all her finery and flowers fell crushed and crumpled at Mrs. Carlton's feet.

“Mamma, what is the matter?” she exclaimed, alarmed at witnessing this strange agitation. She pulled Mrs. Carlton's hands from her face—

their eyes met; the young girl could not understand—she misread the expression which Mrs. Carlton's wore, and she shrank away, adding, "Why do you look at me so, almost as though you hated me?" and her lip quivered painfully.

"Hate you! my darling!—my poor—poor child," Mrs. Carlton sobbed forth, as she threw her arms round Lena, and drawing her towards her, clasped her in a fond embrace.

Grace and her father looked on in amazement at this little scene.

"Christina!" exclaimed the Rector "what can possibly have happened to cause this violent agitation? Compose yourself, my love—see how you distress us all—Lena looks frightened to death!"

He was right; Lena had slowly disengaged herself from Mrs. Carlton's arms, and was returning her troubled gaze with a scared, frightened look.

"Mamma," she said, clasping her hands, "why do you call me 'poor' child in such a

compassionating tone? There is surely no cause for you to pity me! It is cruel to speak to me so, when you know that to-morrow is my wedding-day."

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" Mrs. Carlton murmured, looking at the young girl sorrowfully. "Oh! go away, Lena, take off these things—then come back—but leave me alone with your father for a little while."

The Rector knew that his wife must have something seriously affecting the family to communicate, or she would never have been so fearfully distressed. He knew her nature well; under any trial she generally remained mistress of herself, and was able to direct and advise others—now she seemed utterly overcome. The consoler needed consolation; the helper required help. He saw that she had something for his ear alone. He kissed Lena tenderly on the forehead, saying,

"Go up to your room, darling—take off your dress, or its freshness will be gone be-

fore to-morrow—I will send for you presently. Go with your sister, Grace.”

The two girls crept silently back into their room, whence they had descended a few moments before in so much glee. In dreamy silence, Lena slowly unrobed.

“Do for goodness sake speak, Lena,” said Grace impatiently; “say something! I hate to see people quiet when I want to talk. I wonder what has happened to upset our respected step-mother? I should not wonder if it is something about her precious brother she is so proud of. Perhaps he has been building too many drinking-fountains, or given too many moral teas. Those eminently charitable people do sometimes interest themselves so deeply in other folk’s business, that they quite forget their own. He may, for the benefit of the world in general, have ruined himself in particular. I should not be at all surprised if he and his five children come down and take possession of the Rectory, as soon as you

are gone, and fatten on our substance for the rest of their days. What do you think? Is not mine an ingenious idea?"

"I do not know," replied Lena, languidly, for she had paid but little attention to her sister's chatter. "There is something wrong somewhere. I fancied that mamma looked especially at *me*, as though *I* was concerned in it. What *can* it mean?"

Lena left Grace to torment the dress-maker with chatter, and went downstairs, intending to sit in the breakfast-room, and then wait the course of events. She paused a second at the door of her father's study, and debated whether or not she should go in—but she heard their low earnest voices engaged in discussing some grave subject. She was sure of that, by the changing tones of her father's voice, and the nervous agitation with which he paced the room. She was no eavesdropper—she paused scarcely a second at the door, and then passed on, and placed herself at the

breakfast-room window—watching, wondering, and waiting. How she wished Archie was there! He was expected down at six o'clock to dinner, but he had promised to come down earlier, much earlier, if he could; her heart longed for him now. Oh! if he would only come, things might go on as they would; if he were safe, and well, and by her side, what evil could befall her? Shielded by his arms and in his heart, surely no ill could reach her there—she would be safe, then and for ever more. Was there anything wrong with him. That thought flashed across her mind.

Strange accidents sometimes befall humanity; and his youth, his bravery, all the glory of his fame, could not protect him from mischance. Fate was ever working in the dark, dealing its deadly blows stealthily and unseen; no man could strike again; the strong and the weak—all must go down before it. All the fearful tales of death and horror she had ever heard

now rushed through her brain. She recalled Mrs. Carlton's looks and words, and they came back to her with a new interpretation. She worked herself up into a nervous fever. She had sat there, watching the clock, almost an hour—it seemed like a day; the minutes had never crawled at such a sluggish pace before. She listened; they were talking still, in half hushed, half broken voices. She could bear this uncertainty no longer; she must go in and learn the worst, if worst there was, at once. Rising up from her seat, she tottered across the room; her limbs trembled so that she could not walk steadily to the door. Before she reached it, it was flung suddenly open, and Archie himself, passion-stained and passion-worn, stood before her, and held her in his arms as though he never intended to let her loose again. He never knew how much he cared for her until he felt there was a fear that he might lose her.

“My darling!—my darling!” he said, raining

down cold kisses upon her face; his lips were white and clammy, and their touch chilled her. "Thank God, I see I am in time! I was afraid she would be here before me. Hate travels sometimes faster than love."

The last words hissed through his teeth.

"She!—whom are you talking about? And, Archie, dear—why, how fierce you look!" said Lena, wonderingly, noticing the strange expression of his face.

"No, not fierce, darling—never fierce when I look at you. But I want to speak to you, Lena; I have been a fool, and I want to tell you all about it myself."

His cheek burned; he hardly knew how to tell his miserable story to her. While it had lain like a dead secret between himself and Adrienne, he had thought of it as a "light thing and slight," a matter of too common occurrence to create much commotion either in the world within or the world without. So long as it could be thrust aside, and hidden

away in some dark corner of the past, he would have walked on merrily through the world, caring nothing, or perhaps forgetting it was there. He never reflected that a time will come in the life of every man when some stray gleam of light will penetrate into the grimy holes and corners, where he has hidden away things that are not for the world's eyes; but nothing can be hidden for ever—seldom for long. The dark nooks and crannies of conscience must sometimes be routed over, and deeds long forgotten dragged out into the light of day. The skeleton we are all said to keep in a dark closet will come out, and rattle its dry bones before our averted eyes; we must see it—ay, and sometimes feel it, too, however much we may shrink away, and try to thrust it back into its grave. Archibald's skeleton was before him now, invisible to Lena's eyes, but plain and palpable to his own. He must give it shape and words, and present it to his betrothed bride. Clothe it in the fairest words he

would, he knew it would still be foul and hideous in her pure sight; fain as he had been to gloze it over, now he was compelled to look upon it, he felt forced to admit that it was ugly, even as Adam of old discovered that he was naked when he heard the voice of God, and felt the light of truth.

What could he do? Lena must know all—better she should learn it from his own lips than from any other's; but how to begin, where to begin, so as to give her feelings the slightest, gentlest shock, was the difficulty. He began, with a strong effort to keep his usual composed air—

“I hardly know how to tell you, darling, but I have got into a sad scrape, that alone troubles me enough; but I am doubly troubled when I think that what I say may—nay, must give pain to you.”

“Then do not say it, Archie; indeed, if it is anything that grieves or distresses you, I do not wish to know it. I would rather not hear it.”

"But you must, Lena. It is not, I assure you, with my own good will that I trouble you with this disagreeable matter," he said, grimly; "but I choose to tell it you myself rather than have my character blackened behind my back."

"Who would dare to blacken your character to me?" said Lena, with a slight reproach in her tone.

"I do not think anyone would attempt to do it in words," he said, with a proud confidence in her love, "but some people have a way of putting a simple matter in a harsh and cruel light, Lena. You do not understand these things; and you do not know the trials and temptations that beset a man in his journey through this world; and if he stumbles and falls, the cry is, 'Take him out, and stone him'—even his dearest friends arm themselves, and take their fling."

"But I do know a great deal of the trials and temptations that beset you," replied Lena,

with a look of wisdom; "remember, poor Laurie was always in a scrape of some kind, and he used to make *me* his confidante. But I will not hear anything of your scrapes, Archie. Now that you are here, I am quite happy. I have been watching and waiting for you for the last hour, I was so anxious for you to come; for I have had such a fright. About an hour ago mamma came home, and she spoke and looked at me so strangely"—

"What!" exclaimed Archie, "Mrs. Carlton here!—arrived before me, and has not administered the poison yet! Where is she?"

"In there—with papa," said Lena, pointing to her father's study. "I think there is something serious the matter, they are talking so earnestly, and mamma seemed so distressed when she came in."

Major Dundas was not listening to her, his brain was in a whirl, with its own wild thoughts and fears. Mrs. Carlton appeared to him in the light of his bitterest enemy, armed at all points

to attack him, who was defenceless. He never reflected that duty alone, even if no other feelings prevailed, compelled her to cross his path; fate or chance had led him blindly on to this point, now the issue must soon be known. Would he be able to hold his own, as he held her now in his arms, against Mrs. Carlton's will, against the Rector, against the world? He would have liked to have been like the knight of old, the young Lochinvar, to have had his charger at the gate, and have mounted, and carried his love away in his arms. But such exploits cannot be achieved now; besides, in his case there was little time for words, and the action, at this point of the drama of his life, must be brief. As Lena looked in his face now, and felt his tightening clasp, she knew that some terrible crisis was at hand; the old shadow, which his coming had dissipated, again crept over her, only darker and deadlier than before.

"Archie!" she whispered, "why do you not

“speak to me? why do you look so—half angry and half afraid? If there is anything dreadful to be told, why not tell it me yourself?”

“Promise me one thing, Lena. Promise that nothing shall part us two, now we are so nearly one!”

“What could part us, Archie?” clinging to him closer, and looking tenderly in his face.

“Only your own will—dearest—no other power in this world shall do it,” he answered, his face darkening as he spoke. “I have told you I have been a sad ass, and have fallen, by my own indiscretion, into a sore distress, which I regret as deeply as a man can do—I am afraid you will find it hard to forgive.”

“Do not fear that,” she whispered, assuringly. “You have always seemed so far above me—so good, so noble, and so true, that I shall feel quite proud to be able to forgive you anything. Do not keep me any longer in suspense; I cannot bear it; tell me at once; or if you like, I will give you absolution before I know your sin.”

She spoke out bravely, but she was sick at heart. The last words had scarcely left her lips, when she heard her father's study door open, and with a slow, heavy tread, he came towards the breakfast room, and entered sorrowfully. He started back on seeing Archibald, who with outstretched hand, and the old familiar greeting on his lips, advanced to meet him.

"My dear Guardy," he said, but nothing more; the Rector fixed his eyes with scorn, anger, and indignation upon his face—raised his hand to warn him to advance no farther—but spoke no word to him.

"Lena, my child," he said, with unspeakable love and tender pity, "come here—we have a great grief, but we must share it together." He drew the wondering girl into his study, and Major Dundas was left alone with his own struggling passions, in that room, which was filled with sweet memories of his earlier, better life.

CHAPTER XI.

REJECTED.

“Though still she stood right up, and never shrunk,
But spoke on bravely, glorious lady fair !
Whatever tears her full lips may have drunk.”



ANGER burnt fierce and strong in the Rector's breast, as he looked on his child's white wondering face, and thought of the tale he had to tell her. In what words could he tell it?—how soften the blow which he knew must bruise her spirit, and scar her heart with deep wounds—wounds which time only could heal, and that but slowly. Years would come and go; each might bear away a fragment of her life's great grief; fall away from her by degrees, it would, of course, but a long and

dreary time must pass between *now* and then. It broke his heart to listen to her, when she spoke to him; the words fell trembling from her lips.

“What has Archie done, papa?” she said, looking piteously in his face, and clasping her hands prayerfully. “I know you have something dreadful to tell me about him. Whatever it is, for my sake, you must forgive him—for he is mine, and I am his. We can have no divided pain; if you hurt him, you hurt me. You know how I love him!” She nestled closer to her father, twined her arms round his neck, and hid her face on his breast.

Poor father! he felt the full bitterness of the task he had to perform; it was very hard upon him. Already she appealed to him for mercy—to *him*, as though his hand or his heart was raised against her! All her life long he had sheltered her from every care; saved her from every rough troublesome wind that blew. Now a very storm—a tempest, grief-laden, was

drifting towards her, and he could not shield her from it. He was helpless; he could only stand by and see her suffer—and surely of all griefs that is the worst, to look on and see those we love rent by a sharp agony, which we have no power to allay. When she appealed to him so strongly, “for my sake you must forgive him,” another fear crept over him. Would she, in spite of all he had done, cling to her engagement?—in the midst of her own sorrow, would she be wrought upon by the sight of Archibald’s distress, and consent to become his wife? He knew how differently the great master-passion of life affects different natures, and he dreaded lest it might lead her astray from that path which every right-minded woman in her position ought to take.

With many misgivings at his heart, he told her Adrienne’s melancholy story, and Archibald’s guilt. She never spoke; he could not see her face, but she seemed to listen to him in breathless silence, and he fancied that she clasped her

arms tighter about his neck. When he had finished—and he had told only the plain unvarnished facts of the story, making no comment or remark of his own—they were both silent for a few seconds. More than once, while he was speaking, a great cry would have risen up from her heart, but she crushed it on her lips, and drove it back. A cold mist seemed to sweep over her and chill her to the bone, for she shivered and was still. The poor father's heart bled for his child—he longed to hear her speak. Tenderly and soothingly he said,

“This is a heavy blow, Lena, my child; but, for my sake—for your poor old father's sake—you must try to bear up. God knows, if my life could save you from this trial, I would give it freely—for at best my years can be but few, and you have the whole world before you.”

Lena withdrew herself a little from his arms, and looked in his face, saying,

“You are sure it is all true, papa? Is it not possible there may be some mistake?”

Poor girl! her heart told her plainly enough that it was too true; but, like a drowning man, she was ready to clutch at an imaginary straw, for she felt the treasured hope of her life was floating away from her, and sinking fast.

“Ask him,” said the Rector sorrowfully; he did not wish to influence her in the matter—he was anxious to see in what direction her feelings would lead her. If she inclined the wrong way, it would then be his duty to point out the straightforward road. He knew it would be a terrible trial to break off the engagement at the eleventh hour, when all was so near completion, but it was necessary to be done. She would have to bear not only her own sorrow and disappointment, but to endure the condolence of acquaintances—no light burden. Her story would become the topic of discussion among her friends, and she would be an object of general remark and compassion. He knew that she,

like most sensitive people, would shrink from having her sacred grief dragged forth, and bandied from lip to lip, till it had become public property, distorted and disfigured by colouring and additions, as it passed from one to another, until scarce a vestige of the truth remained; but this would have to be borne, and, after all, it was better to be a nine-days' wonder, among the world's wonder-mongers, than be the wife of a dishonoured man, to become self-degraded and self-abased, as a woman must assuredly be who, on her way to the altar, treads on the bleeding heart of another, and takes the hand of the man who dealt the blow, and swears to love, honour, and obey him. Such things are sometimes done, but they are solemn perjuries. The Rector waited for his daughter's answer to his last words; she repeated them slowly, at first, as though she was not quite sure how much they involved, then she said,

“No, papa, I will not ask him. You have

never deceived me yet, and you would not deceive me now. I know you would rather disguise a fact to give me happiness than colour it to give me pain." Her voice was broken by her sobs, and tears fell unrestrainedly down her cheeks, as she added, "I love him—yes, I love him so well, that I dare not, I cannot see him—I could not trust myself to see him till to-morrow is past. Then, when all the flowers and fair things are faded and gone—gone with all my hopes, all my happiness—I will speak to him. Oh! papa, papa," she moaned, as she sank shuddering on her knees at his side, "pray for me—pray that my heart may not break—that this blow may not kill me," and she clung to him, sobbing helplessly, piteously, as though she would sob her life away.

What could he do? What could he say to comfort her? His heart was wrung with piercing grief at the sight of her bitter distress, and he tried to soothe her with the most tender, endearing words. But no words of his

could calm a spirit distracted by such an overwhelming grief as hers. As well might the consoling warble of a bird hope to allay a raging tempest, or drown the voice of the echoing thunder. The shock, coming so unexpectedly, at such a time, and in such a form, would have rent asunder a stronger, braver spirit than hers. Mingled with the Rector's sympathetic sorrow for his child were feelings of bitter wrath against him who was the cause of all. He had never experienced such bitter feelings against any human being, since he had been a grown man and a Christian minister; he felt as though he could never forgive him.

In the tumult of Mr. Carlton's sorrow and grief, the face of his dead son came surging up from his heart, and a throe of remorse mingled now with his regret. He had loved Archibald so well, had been so unceasingly proud of him, while Laurie's blurred life of folly had vexed his heart continually. The one had always been a striking contrast to the

other, and the superiority had been strongly on Archibald's side. Now things had changed—poor Laurence's faults and follies were dwarfed beside Archibald's great guilt. The Rector now knew that he had overrated the one and undervalued the other, and he was punished. Memory became at once his inquisitor and torturer; it stretched his spirit on a rack of pain. His thoughts flew to the lonely grave where his dead son was lying; he thought of him there crumbling into dust and ashes, and of the successful soldier, in the freshness of life, in the fulness of fame and glory! A glow of satisfaction stole over the Rector's senses—he felt he would rather be the father of the dead Laurence than the living Archibald. Better, far better, that his boy should be lying there in his nameless grave, than have been the hero of this infamous episode in Archibald's brilliant history. Better, far better, as it was. God had willed it so, and from his heart he could say, "Thy will be done!"

Archibald Dundas, meanwhile, remained in the adjoining room, fuming and fretting furiously; railing against fate, not against himself for provoking it. If the truth must be told, he was more frightened and angry at the result, and the discovery of his *faux pas*, than grieved that he had committed it. It never occurred to him that he ought to feel any special remorse, either for the act or its consequences—he regarded both himself and Adrienne as the victims of circumstances; she was the tempter, he the tempted; they had fallen into a dirty slough, and must scramble out as well as they could. He was sorry for Adrienne, but much more sorry for himself. His one great regret was for the pain he knew Lena must feel, however bravely and nobly she might try to bear it; he would gladly have made an expiation, if by so doing he could have saved her from a single pang, but he would have believed that he was making a sacrifice.

As he sat there in his old familiar place,

a whirlwind of thought rushed through his brain, tearing it to tatters. He could not realize his position. He felt as though a cloud had fallen over him, and he had become a stranger in the home that had sheltered him from the day when his own father died, and left him to the kind Rector's care. Had he done anything to forfeit the love and affection which had been heaped upon him? Nothing, he thought, intentionally, though Fate had turned his bolt against him and severely hit him. In spite of the extenuating circumstance he brought forward to excuse himself in his own and the world's eyes, he knew that he had flung sorrow on the heart, and darkness upon the home, of the best and truest friend man ever had.

As he sat there thinking, if thought can exist amid such tumultuous feelings, and waiting to learn the result of Lena's interview with her father, he heard her deep broken sobs, which seemed to rend her heart. He could not

bear it; they stung him to the soul, more than the bitterest reproaches could have done. He rose up, and as he would have strode into the camp of the enemy, to rescue a fallen comrade, he strode into the Rector's study, to rescue his love from the grasp of her great sorrow. Disregarding the Rector's quick forbidding gesture, or the angry words that fell from his lips, at finding his privacy so unceremoniously intruded upon, Archie rushed across the room to Lena's side, and stooping over her, raised her up as though she had been a feather's weight.

"Lena," he whispered—his voice was hoarse with agitation, "look up—you are in my arms now! they had no right to torture you with this story. Forget it, darling, treat it as a dream, and nothing more, which is past and gone." He turned fiercely to the Rector, adding, "You, as her father, might have had some pity on her, if you have none on me—how had you the courage to break her heart like

this! Hush! for God's sake, do not sob so, Lena darling, you will drive me mad!"

His voice had not lost its old magic influence over her—for his sake and at his bidding, she tried to stifle her sobs, and command herself, that she might speak to him.

The Rector addressed Archibald, and expostulated with him, as a man in his position might be supposed to do; he spoke angrily, and with a severity that partially overpowered his judgment, for he felt, at that moment, too keenly to speak wisely; and who could have been calm or master of himself while witnessing a child's distress, and seeing her in the arms of the man who had caused it? Archibald replied to him with no answering wrath, but rather with the impatience of one who is anxious to postpone an unpleasant discussion.

"Presently, sir, presently," he said, "I will hear and answer anything—not now—how can I listen to you, when I have only ears and

eyes for *her*. Lena, darling! speak to me—say you will be mine still—they shall not turn your heart against me?”

Lena half disengaged herself from him, and holding one hand out to her father, she said,

“Papa—ask him if it is all true——”

“Ask me yourself, Lena,” he said, with a spice of his old dictatorial manner; “at this moment I will answer no question from any lips but yours. Is what true?”

“This dreadful story I have heard.”

“How can I tell whether what you have heard is true or not? How do I know what lie may have been told of me, and filtered from one to another, until it has reached your father’s ear and yours. A small folly may be magnified until it looks as grim as a great sin.”

“But this—this about Adrienne, Archie,” interrupted Lena, with an appealing look into his face; “if you will say ‘no,’ I will believe there is some mistake—I will take your word before that of the whole world.”

She listened breathlessly for his answer; it came at last. He had a momentary impulse to deny it; but his better nature overcame the temptation.

"So much of it is true," he said, slowly, "that we have both been foolish, and have got into an unpleasant scrape together—but it is over and past, Lena, long ago. You ought never to have heard it, and—it is nothing, darling—and I will never see her again so long as I live—never!"

A change crept slowly over Lena's face as Archibald spoke. Her mind had been worked up to a state of feverish excitement. Every nerve seemed to quiver, every thought to cling to a hope that he might be still less guilty than he seemed. Now every nerve relaxed, every thought fell away—her face changed from pale to red, from red to pale again. His words, that seemed so few and simple, meant so much—instead of veiling the truth, they made it only too plain to her. She

knew that the worst was true. The light way in which he spoke, the very means he took to soothe, revolted her—sorrow and grief for her own lost love gave way to anger and indignation against him. She looked up in his face, and an expression of scorn curled her white lips, and kindled in her eyes, as she repeated his last words—

“You will never see her again! and you say that to please *me*! Do you think I would wish you to desert one whom you have already deceived? and for my sake? No! no! no! it is me you must leave—me you must never see again. You have deceived us both——”

“No,” he exclaimed interrupting her, “I have deceived neither. I have always loved you, and you only; I never cared—I never professed to care for Adrienne de Fontaine.”

“All the worse,” exclaimed Lena indignantly, “more shame to you, more pity for her! If you had loved her, and still wished to keep faith with *me* for honour’s sake, I should have pitied

myself, and forgiven you, and have respected and cared for you always. Then you might have had some excuse, now you have none. You have acted without love, without principle, without honour, and I—" her indignation melted away into sorrow—"I have loved you all these years, and never thought how cold and cruel you could be—that it must all end at last, all come to this!"

"I have never been cold or cruel, especially to you—but you do not understand these things, Lena. You seem to consider me as some particular monster—and—and I cannot discuss the matter with you. Hundreds of better men than I have done worse actions with less excuse, and have gone unscathed and honoured to the end of their lives. I have done no wrong to you—"

"You do," said Lena, her eyes flashing through her tears—"you do me the greatest wrong of all. You knew how we all loved Adrienne, you knew how lost and lonely her life had been, and you have made it lonelier still—you have

taken away the little hope, the little pleasure she might have had, and given her grief and shame instead, and you come to *me* with my friend's, my poor Adrienne's broken heart upon your hands, and offer to throw it aside, to turn your back on her and her wretched life for ever; as though your cruelty to her would prove your love for me!"

"Hush! Lena, for mercy's sake, no more of that; from *you* at least, who love me, I expected some defence, some sympathy. God help us all, if those who love us best excuse us least. We are all human, all apt to fall into error, and no man can do more than amend it. To-morrow, we will open a new page and begin a new life together."

"There is, there can be no to-morrow for me!" exclaimed Lena, piteously. "Oh, Archie, it is terrible to lose you, but there is no help for it—none! No! no! do not speak to me, I cannot bear it. It is enough for me to have to struggle against myself, I can have no strife with you."

"I cannot have my child any further distressed," said the Rector, as he came between them, and led her from the room, in spite of Archibald's efforts to detain her for "one word more." After a few moments' absence Mr. Carlton returned, closed the door, and said,

"Now, Major Dundas. Whatever you have to say you can say it to me."

"I hardly know what to say, or how to speak, while you treat me with this frigid coldness," he replied, walking the room in great agitation, for the Rector's severe looks told him more plainly than words could have done, that he would find no ally in him. Major Dundas had felt so sure of his mastery over Lena's heart and soul, that he was amazed at her desertion of him; he knew she had cause to be angry and grieved, but he believed she would have clung to him through all. When she fell away from him, he felt his cause had lost all its strength. He paused suddenly in his walk, and stretched

out his hand to the Rector, saying, in his old winning way,

“Come, let us be friends; you have borne with so much, and so many of my faults, from my boyhood upwards, Guardy—you will not desert me now, when I have so much need of you—let us shake hands, and talk this matter over calmly.”

“Archie,” said the Rector, with great emotion, though without taking the offered hand, “I have loved you as my own son—God forgive me, perhaps better than my own son; but I would rather you had died upon the field of battle, that a shot had spared you this degradation, and me from the pain of witnessing it. You and I cannot clasp hands again, until you have done your best to retrieve the false step you have taken.”

“That is the very thing I wish to do,” he replied, excitedly, “but you all seem inclined to join in a hue and cry against me, as though you would run me down. You all

preach from one text, and hurl your condemnation on me, as though I, and I only, was to blame, while she——”

“God pity her!” said the Rector, solemnly; “she has enough to bear—she has lost her own and the world’s esteem; you, and you only, if you are noble and strong enough, have power to restore either. Archie, you must give her back her good name and fame, if you would retain your own. You are young now,” he added, not unkindly, “but a day will come when you will be old, and it will be a sorry sight for you to look back and see such blots as these staining a life that is otherwise honourable. You have destroyed a woman’s reputation and my child’s happiness.”

“No! no! do not say that!” exclaimed Archibald, more deeply distressed by the Rector’s calmness than he would have been by the most violent reproaches; “I cannot, I will not lose her! I entreat you, for my poor father—your dead friend’s sake—stand by me in this——”

“Appeal to your dead father’s name in behalf of a better cause than this,” said Mr. Carlton, sternly.

In vain Archibald argued, reasoned, and entreated the Rector to use his influence to induce Lena to keep her engagement the next morning; but Mr. Carlton was inexorable—he simply said it was impossible. His voice, and his manner, too, became more tender and consoling before their interview ended. In the midst of his own deep grief and perplexity, he felt some compassion for Archibald, for he knew that a cruel and bitter disappointment had fallen upon him, and however just and deserved it was, still, it was painful to witness and hard to bear.


It was almost midnight when Major Dundas left the Rectory. He looked up at the window of Lena’s room as he passed out—the curtains were closely drawn, not a gleam of light crept through them; it was all dark without, as dark as the despair within. For

a second he stood there with a yearning heart, as though he half expected her bright face would gleam out upon him, as it had so often done before, when he had come and gone many times and oft, in the old, happy days. Alas! would it never brighten at his approach again? Had the light died out of her sweet face, never to beam again on him? Sick at heart, sullen and angry, he made his way through the village, till he reached the "Grapes Inn." They all knew him there, and they welcomed him with happy looks and pleasant words, and began to talk to him, and show him their rustic preparations for the festivities on the morrow. To their amazement, he replied to their civilities with a flashing eye and a hasty curse, and strode past them upstairs, called the landlord, and told him he should sleep there that night, and leave Crofton early in the morning.

CHAPTER XII.

A DIFFICULTY REMOVED.

“As the cross that a wild nun clasps, till the edge of it
bruises her bosom,
So love wounds as we grasp it, and blackens and burns as
a flame ;
I have loved overmuch in my life ; when the live bud
bursts with the blossom,
Bitter as ashes or tears is the fruit, and the wine thereof
shame.”

R. and Mrs. Carlton, for the rest of that
sorrowful night, occupied themselves
in writing letters to their different friends who
had been invited to the wedding, informing
them that “the marriage between Miss Carlton
and Major Dundas would not take place.” No
definite reason was given ; they merely stated

that "circumstances had occurred which rendered the marriage impossible." They were anxious to avoid doing anything that could reflect on either Archibald or Adrienne, and were resolved that, so far as they were themselves concerned, the real facts should never transpire. Both those guilty ones had suffered severely; no special act of providence or of justice was needed to bring about their punishment—it followed in the natural course of events, treading hard upon the heels of their sin, and bruising them body and soul.

In the morning, as soon as daybreak, the messengers were despatched to their neighbours and friends, most of whom lived within a dozen miles of Crofton.

Archibald Dundas, too, rose up early in the morning, worn and unrefreshed; all the fatigues and hardships of the late campaign had failed to stamp on his face the haggard look which it now wore. His lips were compressed, his cheeks were flushed, and his eyes looked stern

and fierce with a feverish light; these were all mute signals that his harassed soul hung out, showing how severe a conflict had been carried on within his breast between his passions and his grief. He walked towards the Rectory, before the village was astir, to try and gain some intelligence of Lena; perhaps with a forlorn hope of seeing the Rector, and making another appeal to him; or, who could tell, perhaps to his lost love herself. He was determined to strike a last blow in defence of his life's joy; and, then, if it failed, it would be time enough to consider what step he ought to take. On his way to the Rectory, he met Mr. Carlton's messengers on their several missions, and learned from them the real state of affairs at the Rectory. Lena had not left her room, and Mrs. Carlton was closeted with her. Archibald knew now that all was over! With a darkening face he resolved to take the first train and return to London.

On his way to the station he met Sir Frederic Trevor driving into Crofton. He had come from the west of England purposely to be present at the wedding, and had slept in the adjoining village, in order that he might drive over early, and accompany the bride to church. He pulled up as soon as he perceived Major Dundas, and greeted him kindly, though not cordially, for he loved not the man; perhaps he envied him, and coveted the prize he would have given anything to possess. After inquiring after the bride, he continued, without waiting for answer—

“Come, if you will jump up beside me, I will drive you wherever you wish to go, for I have plenty of time.”

“You can turn your horses’ heads and drive yourself to the devil!” replied Archie, grimly; “there will be no wedding, for there is no bride.”

“No bride!” echoed Sir Frederic, letting fall the reins with an exclamation of profound

horror ; but the expression of Major Dundas's face, which had more of bitter wrath than of sorrow in it, assured him in a moment that no serious personal calamity had happened at the Rectory.

Major Dundas did not wait to give any explanation, but hurried on to the railway-station. Sir Frederic lashed his horses, and drove furiously to the Rectory.

Mr. Carlton received the Baronet with grave emotion ; to him, his old friend, and to him only, did he reveal the truth. Sir Frederic deeply sympathised with the family trouble ; he felt keenly for Lena's disappointment and grief, but his feelings were not all sorrowful. Apart from any selfish feelings of his own, he had always regretted her choice, and had never thought it a happy one. He had seen the selfishness and egotism that marked every action of Archie's life, and blotted the higher and nobler qualities of his character. Sir Frederic at once resumed his position as

medical adviser, and was admitted into Lena's presence. The sight of her pale face in its irrepressible sadness entirely unmanned him. It cost him an effort to control his voice, and speak to her in his old calm way. If he had been able, he would gladly have plucked the sorrow out from the roots of her heart, and planted it in his own. He spoke to her with the same free manly tenderness which had always won for him so large a portion of her affectionate regard and confidence.

"I know you are very sorry for me," she said, trying to conjure a faint smile to her languid lips—"it is very sad for me, is it not?—but please do not speak of it; do not look as though you pitied me so much—I cannot bear it."

Presently Sir Frederic drew the Rector aside, saying—

"She ought not to remain here for a single hour, Carlton. Of course I know the state

of confusion you are in ; it is impossible for you to leave Crofton, but *she* must be removed. I will at once telegraph home, and beg my dear old mother to prepare to receive Lena and Grace. You can trust them to me, old friend," he added, wringing the Rector's hand. "I will look after them, and try to amuse them, till you have set your affairs in order ; then I should advise you to take them abroad—say to Paris ; there is so much there to attract and amuse the mind, she will be driven away from thoughts of herself, and be forced to take an interest in the world around her."

They talked the matter over, and it was decided that Sir Frederic Trevor was to take the two girls as soon as possible down to Trevor Manor, the old family mansion, which was filled with historical associations that could not fail to be interesting even to passing strangers. It must not be supposed that Mrs. Carlton forgot for a moment the hap-

less girl whose fate had exercised so great an influence over Lena's life; but a week or ten days elapsed before she could make it convenient to leave home and return to Adrienne, whose melancholy case caused her great anxiety, not so much for the present as the future. What would become of her in the long dreary life that lay before her? Mrs. Carlton's heart bled for her; she considered over and over again what course would be the wisest and most judicious to pursue. She could not—she would not leave her alone in the great cold world again—but what then? Could she take her back to Crofton, burthened with her living proof of sin and shame? No. Respect for her own home and the modesty of her daughters forbade that. A mother who had never been a wife could be no associate for them. No matter how piteous was the case, or extenuating the circumstances that surrounded it, the fact remained the same; it could not be covered, nor should

it be glozed over. Once she thought of making an appeal to Madame de Fontaine's feelings as a mother, as a woman, but a moment's reflection caused her to abandon that idea. Her motherly feelings had slumbered through all her daughter's dreary life of innocence and youth, and it was not likely that they would be wakened now by the blast of shame which had set its red seal upon her. If nature had been mute for twenty years, it was not likely to speak now, however loud and long the sorrow of her fallen child might call upon it.

Again, there was Adrienne herself to be considered. Would she submit to her mother's control?—or would she, having grown desperate, rebel against all authority, and resolve to go her own headlong course? Mrs. Carlton trembled for her.

Perplexed and agitated, she reached Newman Street at last. The door was open, and Mrs. Carlton, unquestioned, passed up the stairs,

and entered Adrienne's apartment. The room was seemingly empty, all within it was so silent and still. A bright fire burned in the grate; the hearth was newly swept, and there was an air of cleanliness and comfort around, which contrasted greatly with the squalor that had struck Mrs. Carlton on her former visit. The silence brought a chill to her heart; she fancied it was like the silence of death. She stepped noiselessly to the bedside, and softly raised the curtains. There lay Adrienne sleeping, and close by her side, with one hand resting on it, was a tiny blue coffin!

The baby voice would never reproach her with its feeble cry. God in his mercy had hushed it to rest. So all the outer sign of her shame and degradation had dwindled down to this!—had crumbled into dust; a little grave would cover it, and hide it from the world's eyes for ever. Henceforth she need bear no outward visible symbol of her shame about her; but only the memory of a great

grief and a great wrong would be bound, like a stone, upon her heart for evermore, to grow looser and lighter perhaps as years rolled on, but never wholly to pass away. Mrs. Carlton uttered a sigh of relief and thanksgiving, as she seated herself by the bedside to await Adrienne's waking. She had not been seated long when the door opened, and a man entered the room, followed by the landlady, both treading lightly, as though they feared to awake the sleeper.

On recognizing Mrs. Carlton, she came softly towards her, informing her, in a few brief words, that they intended to remove the remains of the child while Adrienne slept, as when she was awake she had grieved so bitterly, and made such a piteous resistance when they attempted to take it from her sight, that they had chosen this opportunity. Once gone, grief or regrets would be in vain; she would soon be reconciled to her loss.

To this Mrs. Carlton perfectly agreed. The

man stepped lightly to the bedside, and attempted slowly to draw the tiny coffin from beneath the mother's hand without disturbing her. He partially succeeded, but as her hand fell upon the coverlet, she started up, and clutched at her dead treasure, exclaiming,

"Oh, no! no! not yet! Let it stay a little longer!"

"My dear lady, there is nothing there," said the woman kindly.

"But it would have grown up and loved me some day," moaned Adrienne piteously, "for I would never have been cold or cruel to it."

Mrs. Carlton laid her hand firmly on the excited girl, and drew her towards her, saying in French,

"Let it go, Adrienne; it is God's will—God's mercy that has taken it!"

The effect of Mrs. Carlton's voice on Adrienne was magical. She looked up in her face with wide-open bewildered eyes. For a second amazement kept her silent; then her face flushed

crimson, and, with a cry of shame and grief, she crouched down under the clothes of her bed, and hid her face. Meanwhile the little coffin was conveyed slowly away. Mrs. Carlton, kind and tender, as well as wise and strong, endeavoured, by every means in her power, to assuage the poor girl's grief, and pluck out the sting from her wounded spirit. She made no attempt to palliate the wrong Adrienne had committed, but she tried to reconcile her to bear her punishment—not to sink under it. She cheered her, and gave her an encouraging hope that she might rise up and go out into the world, and do a woman's noble work yet.

There are some women whose voices are attuned to win confidence and command attention; Mrs. Carlton was one of these. Slowly Adrienne hushed her sobs, and, grateful for the sweet words of hope and consolation that fell from Mrs. Carlton's lips, she crept nearer and nearer to her, till she lay folded in her willing arms, and there, with broken sighs and

tears, told her sad story. Mrs. Carlton's quick perceptions saw and understood it all; she asked no question, made no remark. She was deeply interested in that portion which related to the Bennett family; especially in little blind Aggie, whose affectionate homage had been a blessing to Adrienne during her lonely life in Kirkman's Buildings. Mrs. Carlton established herself in Newman Street until such a time as Adrienne was able to be removed; then she determined that, now the one great impediment had been mercifully taken away, she would take her home to Crofton, during the absence of the two girls, and keep her there for awhile, until she could make other arrangements for her future well-doing. Adrienne was quiet and submissive; her old wilful spirit seemed to be slowly dying out. Once or twice, on some rare occasion, it leaped up with a kind of flickering gleam, but was soon gone. Mrs. Carlton was surprised that she made no inquiry after Lena or Grace: she

never even mentioned their names, and especially seemed to avoid that of Archibald Dundas. She would sit for hours, looking over and smoothing out the tiny things she had spent such loving care, and so many lonely hours, in adorning. Mrs. Carlton did all she could to occupy her mind with other matters. One wet dreary day, when they both sat silently watching the rain-drops pattering from the eaves of the houses, she looked with a longing wistful gaze into her kind friend's face.

"Well, what is it, Adrienne?" Mrs. Carlton asked, smiling; "you looked as if you wished to ask me something."

"So I do," she answered slowly. "I—I want to know if *he* sent you to me?"

"He! who?" inquired Mrs. Carlton.

"Ah! there is but one in all the world who could, who ought to care for me now."

"You mean Major Dundas? No—I will not deceive you, Adrienne—he did not send me," replied Mrs. Carlton.

“He has forgotten me—quite forgotten me,” exclaimed Adrienne, drooping her head. For a moment she seemed buried in deep thought: then she looked timidly in Mrs. Carlton’s face, and said in a low, despairing kind of voice,

“Is it all over yet? I—I think I could bear it better now: at first it seemed so hard and cruel.”

“Is what over?” inquired Mrs. Carlton, not exactly understanding to what Adrienne was alluding.

“His marriage?” she gasped at last.

“If you mean his marriage with Lena Carlton, no, it is not over—more than that, it will never take place. She knows all, and has refused him.”

“For my sake! I know it was for my sake,” exclaimed Adrienne excitedly; “but she loved him,” she added regretfully, “she must have loved him, and she has sacrificed herself for me—for me—who am so unworthy!”

Mrs. Carlton endeavoured to explain to her

the higher and nobler principles on which Lena had acted.

"No, it was not for your sake only she rejected him, Adrienne. He has proved himself unworthy of a pure trusting love, and no woman who respects herself can stoop to an unworthy object."

"But when we love deeply we forget self-respect. All thought of self dies away, and it is not always the most worthy who is best beloved. I do not believe there is another in all the world who would have behaved so nobly as Lena Carlton has done!"

"I do," replied Mrs. Carlton; "I believe there are thousands."

During her stay in London, Mrs. Carlton paid more than one visit to the Bennett family. Her esteem for them rapidly increased. The day before they were to start for Crofton Mrs. Carlton was much occupied; she had been out from the early part of the morning until almost dusk. On her return she was

accompanied by little Aggie, having persuaded the Bennetts to entrust the child to her care; she intended to take her down to spend a few months in the Rectory, where she would be an occupation and companion for Adrienne. The meeting between Aggie and Adrienne was touching to the extreme. The child, with the quick mental perception of the blind, discovered that Adrienne was changed, and made inquiries, and quaint remarks in her quiet way, that sent the blood tingling to Adrienne's cheeks.

Arrived at Crofton, and guided by the Rector's advice, one of Mrs. Carlton's first acts was to pay a visit to the Manor-house, and endeavour to soften Madame de Fontaine's heart towards her daughter. Of course she did not expose the full extent of Adrienne's fault—no good was to be gained by such exposure. Reproaches and upbraidings might drive her back to worse evil, rather than win her over to good. Mrs. Carlton spoke only of her long repentance, her sickness, and her sorrow.

"She has returned at last," Mrs. Carlton said, "weary of her wilful wanderings—the brightness of her life is gone, she is broken in spirit, anxious to see your face again, and willing to submit to your discipline, and try to win your affection."

Madame de Fontaine listened calmly, and with no outward expression of her feelings, to all Mrs. Carlton said, then answered,


"I am obliged by the great interest you have always professed to take in me and mine, though it has availed but little; in this matter of my daughter, however, I cannot accept you as the mediator—she must act for herself. She passed out of these doors of her own free will, at no bidding of mine; when she wishes to return she must knock at my gates, and ask to be admitted. She must trust to my clemency for the rest."

Mrs. Carlton returned home, grateful for this ungraciously accorded permission for Adrienne's return.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BRIDEGROOM.

“ If thou and nature can so gently part,
 The stroke of death is as a lover’s pinch,
 Which hurts, and is desired. Dost thou lie still ?
 If thus thou vanishest, thou tell’st the world
 It is not worth leave-taking.”

ENA and Grace Carlton received a most warm and tender welcome from Mrs. Trevor, who made every possible arrangement for their comfort and convenience. Sir Frederic, on his part, taxed all his energies for the amusement of his young friends; when the weather was fine, he walked with them in his own beautiful grounds, or drove them out to view the fine scenery of the surrounding country ;

if the weather was unpromising, or they were disinclined to go out, he entertained them in his own quaint, whimsical way at home. Of course they were kept well informed of the progress of affairs at the Rectory.

One evening they were sitting in the large bay window, watching the most glorious sunset they had seen for many a day, when their attention was suddenly attracted to the world below, by a solitary figure, who was winding his way rapidly through the park-like grounds that surrounded the house. One moment he was lost among the trees, the next he reappeared, and so on, till he reached the wide carriage-drive that led direct to the house. Simultaneously they recognized the unexpected visitor. A dark frown contracted Sir Frederic's brows, as he sprang from his seat, and would have gone out to meet his visitor upon the threshold; but Lena's soft hand laid upon his arm detained him, and though the colour faded from her cheek, she said calmly,

"I must see him, if you please, Sir Frederic, and you must not interfere between us."

"Your father left you in *my* charge, Lena, and I am answerable for you in more ways than one," he answered, in a tone that was strangely cold, for him, who was usually so kind.

"I will be answerable for myself," she said. "My father would have trusted me, and so will you."

At this moment the door was thrown open, and "Major Dundas" was announced. Sir Frederic received him with cool courtesy.

"I ought to apologise for intruding here," said Archibald. "I need hardly say I should never have come so far to pay my respects to *you*, Sir Frederic Trevor—my business is with Miss Carlton. I wish to see her for a few moments alone, and so I *will*," he muttered, between his clenched teeth.

Lena spoke a few low, earnest words to Sir Frederic, threw a shawl hastily over her, and turning to Archibald, said,

"I would rather talk to you out in the open air than here."

She opened the window and went out; he followed her. Sir Frederic and Grace Carlton stood at the window, watching in silence their retreating figures; a strange feeling of mistrust mingled simultaneously in their thoughts. A few moments only they saw Lena's light dress fluttering among the trees, and the tall dark figure striding slowly by her side—then they were lost to sight. They waited, and waited, till long after the sun had set, and the soft grey shadows of twilight were mingling with the leaden clouds of night. Still she did not return. They became first anxious, then alarmed.

"I ought not to have trusted her!" exclaimed Sir Frederic, in a husky, regretful voice.

And they went out through different parts of the grounds in search of her. A long time they wandered in vain—at last they found her. She was leaning over a narrow wicket-gate, that led into a pathway which stretched across the

meadows into the high-road. Her hands were clasped together, and her eyes were fixed, with a kind of trance-like expression, upon the lonely highway, for not a soul was visible, either far or near. She was alone—Archibald had left her. A feeling of awe and wonder crept over them as they looked on her—she was so motionless and still. Sir Frederic stepped quickly to her side, and said,

“You have wandered too far away, Lena, the dews are falling. Come in!—come back!”

As he took her hand, and looked upon her face, its expression perplexed him. Though the tears had slowly gathered and filled her eyes, yet her face had a radiant, beautiful look—no shade of discontent, or sorrow, or anger was on it now. Their voices falling on her ear seemed to break some spell. She threw her arms round her sister’s neck, exclaiming,

“Oh! Grace, he will be our own, our hero, our noble Archie once more!”

“Lena!” exclaimed Grace, in a sharp, angry

tone, "what can you mean? Surely, after all that has happened, you have not been mad enough to give way—he has never got your promise over again?"

"No," replied Lena, proudly, "but I have got his promise, and I know he will keep his word."

* * * * *

About a month after Major Dundas had paid that strange visit to Trevor Manor House, a strange scene took place in the village church at Crofton. Major Dundas was there, looking white, stern, and decided. He had come to redeem the promise he had given to Lena Carlton.

The church was empty and silent, a hollow echo followed his footsteps as he strode with a firm, proud step towards the altar, and there stood still and watched and waited. Presently the low sweet tones of the organ awoke, like the voice of an immortal soul, and wandered plaintively along the narrow aisles, winding in

and out among the columns, until it reached the groined roof, and filled the church with a mysterious harmony, sending its searching spirit into every nook and crevice, as though seeking for something it could not find. The church doors opened, and the wedding party entered and came slowly up the aisle, where the bridegroom awaited them. It was but a scanty train. First came Adrienne, leaning on Sir Frederic Trevor's arm, not with the elastic step and serene, contented look of a happy bride. Her foot fell heavily on the ground, and there was a set, fixed expression in her face, and in her large dark eyes, that was painful to witness. She seemed to be looking beyond the altar, at something far away in the future or in the past that no eyes could see except her own. Behind her came her sister Mathilde, in her quaint nun's habit, leaning on the blind child Aggie. Mrs. Carlton and Madame de Fontaine brought up the rear; no gay company followed, no bridal white and favors, no bright wedding graces; the

bride herself wore a dress of soft silver grey, and a lace veil that covered her from head to foot. A tragic element mingles with many weddings, and in many forms, but never with such outward show as it mingled now in this. No joy-bells were ringing, no smiles of expectation shone upon their faces. They looked rather as though they had come thither to bury a dead love than to welcome one new-born. The Rector had already taken his place within the altar railings, and began to read the service in a deeply impressive and touching tone. As he proceeded, little Aggie raised her sightless eyes in the direction of his voice, and listened with reverential attention; once or twice she put out her hands in a slow, hesitating way, and nestled them in the soft folds of Adrienne's dress. The ceremony was over. The closing word had left Mr. Carlton's lips. The bride still knelt at the altar, leaning forward with clasped hands, and her head resting on the altar rails, as though absorbed in prayer. It was a solemn moment,

and nobody felt inclined to interrupt her. Indeed all hearts were prayerfully inclined, when suddenly a loud shriek burst from the blind girl's lips. She leaned forward, threw her arms round Adrienne, and lifted her blind eyes to the bride's pale face. Her cry electrified all present; simultaneously they pressed forward to raise the child. The bride alone moved not; not an eyelid quivered, not a pulse stirred. Major Dundas whispered softly to her, and took her hand. Forgetful of the place or circumstance, he raised her up, and spoke aloud—

“Adrienne!” His voice rang to the roof of the church, but she answered not. Her dark, wide open eyes were fixed upon his face, and her hand lay cold and rigid in his. Then Sir Frederic Trevor rushed forward, took the pale girl from his arms, carried her into the vestry, and shut the door. Awe and wonder, a feeling of undefined horror, lay heavy on the hearts of all the party.

Only the blind child knelt shuddering and

still, where they had placed her. With her mind's eye she had seen, what their eyes had failed to behold—Archibald was too late; another bridegroom had called and led home the bride.

EPILOGUE.

NEARLY three years had passed since Sir Frederic Trevor held the dead bride in his arms; three eventful years they were in the career of all those who have played their parts in this startling drama; but the events that marked those months and years must not be recorded here. Old Mrs. Trevor was dead, and Sir Frederic was travelling abroad, either to bury an old grief or rear up a new joy. He had often doubted, as many have done before him, whether access of fortune brings increase of happiness. This, however, he had learned, that however much propitious fate and good fortune may do for a man, there are still two things which he must win for himself—fame and love! With something of Paul Flem-

ming's spirit, he had been wandering through Germany, making himself acquainted with ancient castles, quaint old towns, and the beautiful Rhine, that right royal river, the gem of the German land, the pride of the German heart, that travels onward from its cradle in the snow-clad Alps to its sandy grave, so many miles away, through scenes of unrivalled beauty, amid the glorious works of nature and the romantic ruins of art. Sir Frederic travelled with his eyes wide open; his heart expanding at the sight of every new beauty he beheld. He had been so far and so long away from his home in England, that the dear old days, and the happy hours he had spent at Crofton, seemed an age ago. After awhile he turned his back upon the busy German land, and penetrated into the regions of snow and ice, the land of glaciers and cloud-capped mountains. There he encountered that which he had travelled so long and so far to avoid.

At the mouth of the Rhone Valley lies Martigny; and there, with a magnificent view of its serried

ranks of rugged mountains, with the white foaming waters of the Dranse rushing and roaring at their feet, stands the Hôtel Grande Maison et Poste, once the home and palace of the Bishops of Batiaz, now a flourishing inn of great repute. It was there that Sir Frederic Trevor had been staying for nearly a month, making it his head-quarters, and going short excursions to the famous passes and glaciers which abound in the neighbourhood. Dear bright Martigny! how he loved the place and the people! What a glorious fellow was the Maître d'Hôtel! a grand specimen of the stalwart mountaineer, full of anecdote, and the legendary lore of his romantic land. The Grande Maison itself had a great charm for Sir Frederic. In that quaint old building whole suites of rooms open out upon a wide corridor, that runs round the inner portion of the house, forming a square, and looking down upon a grass-covered courtyard. The swallows, too, dive in and out of the open arches; build their nests, and rear

their young among the bell wires that run from door to door. The rooms, all uncarpeted, are floored with inlaid wood of quaint designs, and the ceilings are formed of broad oaken beams, emblazoned with the bishop's arms; the latticed windows look out upon a wild untrained garden, a very wilderness of bright colours and sweet-smelling flowers.

Sir Frederic Trevor, now that the time had come that he must wend his way back into the busy world again, was loath to go. He wandered along the corridors, casting lingering, loving glances around him, as people do when they are leaving a place never perhaps to see it again. The Maître d'Hôtel came up to tell him that his luggage was packed and all ready for him to start. He drew on his gloves slowly and descended the stairs. In the wide stone gallery below the whole household had assembled to bid him "Good-bye," and "God speed;" his genial spirit had made him friends from the highest to the lowest among them; it was plea-

sant to him, a lonely solitary man, to feel he was regretted, even by the servants of a public hotel. "You have all helped to make this place so much like home to me," he said, "that I hope and intend to be back among you before long."

He had scarcely uttered those words when a vehicle of the country dashed up to the door. A gentleman and a lady got out. There was no mistaking the fair handsome face and lithe figure of the man; the lady called him "Archie," and laughingly upbraided him for an awkward rent in her dress. The one word "Archie," spoken by that voice, carried Sir Frederic back to the old happy days at Crofton, which had seemed so far away! He made one step forward, held out his hand, and called her by her name—

"Lena!"

She had hardly time to give him a bright look and a welcoming word, when Major Dundas came up, and touched his hat.

"Ah, Sir Frederic!" he said, "you and I are doomed to cross one another, even among the Swiss mountains."

He performed the needless ceremony of introducing Lena, saying,

"My wife! I have had a hard battle, Sir Frederic, but you see I have won at last. I am sure you congratulate me."

Sir Frederic Trevor did not congratulate him—but merely bowed and passed out. He threw himself into his carriage and drove off. A cold wind seemed to spring up, for he drew his wrapper round him, and shivered as though he had been chilled to the heart.

THE END.

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